An artistic inquiry into the use of food in a photograph and its implications on cultural meanings

Yu, Jasper Fengyao

2020

Yu, F. J. (2020). An artistic inquiry into the use of food in a photograph and its implications on cultural meanings. Master's thesis, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

<https://hdl.handle.net/10356/143274>

<https://doi.org/10.32657/10356/143274>

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SINGAPORE

**An Artistic Inquiry into the Use of Food in a Photograph and its Implications on
Cultural Meanings**

**Yu Fengyao Jasper
School of Art, Design and Media
2020**

**An Artistic Inquiry into the Use of Food in a Photograph and its Implications on
Cultural Meanings**

Yu Fengyao Jasper

School of Art, Design and Media

A thesis submitted to the Nanyang Technological University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (Research)

2020

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I certify that all work submitted for this thesis is my original work. I declare that no other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement. Except where it is clearly stated that I have used some of this material elsewhere, this work has not been presented by me for assessment in any other institution or University. I certify that the data collected for this project are authentic and the investigations were conducted in accordance with the ethics policies and integrity standards of Nanyang Technological University and that the research data are presented honestly and without prejudice.

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This thesis **does not** contain any materials from papers published in peer-reviewed journals or from papers accepted at conferences in which I am listed as an author.

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Yu Fengyao Jasper

Acknowledgements

To my supervisor, Associate Professor Oh Soon-Hwa, who gave willingly of her time wherever she was (Singapore, Korea, India), and energy to provide invaluable guidance and critical feedbacks that nurtured me as an artist and a researcher.

To my “Sensei”, Professor Paul Kohl, for his precious time and generous support all the way from Lisbon, by agreeing to be my proof reader and editor and also previously providing me with his precious letter of recommendation for my research scholarship.

To my mentor, John Clang, also for contributing his letter of recommendation for my research scholarship.

To my lovely wife, Lam Hui Lin, who has been so encouraging and patient with me even towards the last lap of my research when our new-born, Rex, arrived while I was a couple weeks away from submission and too occupied with this thesis. I love both of you so much.

To my brother-in-law, Lam Cheng Yen, for providing a second opinion at various stages of my research.

To my dad Jeffrey Ge and sister Joscelin Yu, for their unconditional love and support through my course of study. Plus, a special shout out to my chef mum Judy Thiam who constantly pampered me and inspired me with her blazing passion for food.

To professors who have conducted coursework over the past two decades at NTU/ADM; Associate Professor Andrea Nanetti, Associate Professor Michael Walsh for their contributions and useful advice, with special thanks to Professor Yin Ker, who conducted one of the most challenging post graduate classes of my student career and drilled me to become a better researcher by applying “rigor” as an attitude to all my intellectual endeavours.

To my post graduate schoolmates: Vincent, Suzi, Han, Marina, Ryan, Andrew, Olivia, Ya Jing, Sue, Huiying, Hera, Vanessa, Melvin, Gideon, Christian, Charles, Zann and Iskandar

who constantly showered me with love and encouragement to get through the difficult times of submissions.

To my ex-ADM classmates, Guo Yixiu, Sam Chin, Hu Qiren, and Ong Cheewee for constantly checking on me and offering their unstinting support.

To the faculty members of NTU/ADM, Hsiao Ching and Jess for timely email replies to my administrative concerns and special thanks to Ahmad Azahki, for his extended support with the school camera equipment and precious time to share his technical knowledge with me.

To my close friends, Cherie, Jun Xiang, Chris, Ming Yuan, Frenchescar & Wei Liang who gave me morale boosters throughout this research.

To a group of angelic intellectuals, Rie, Xinying, Yixian, Terence, Angela, Yixiu and Iskandar whom gladly offered to help me with my proofing.

To Auntie Noor's and Uncle Raja's family, for their sharing with me their notions of comfort food and overwhelming hospitality to invite me over to their place for a comfort food lunch.

To the Singapore Food Bank, for their generosity in sharing their expired food with me as material for my research.

To all remaining individuals, who have crossed path with me and helped me in one way or another. I am truly humbled and thankful for all of your help.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	6
Abstract	10
Introduction	11
<i>Research Objectives.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Research Methodology.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Overview of Thesis.....</i>	<i>16</i>
The Intellectual Inquiry	18
<i>Identifying the Challenges in using Photography as a Form of Representational Art.....</i>	<i>18</i>
Photography as Art	18
The Camera's Relationship to its Mechanical Materiality	20
Relationship Between Artist's Intention and Viewer's Interpretation.....	22
A Photograph's Relationship to Notions of Representation	24
<i>Studies on Fine Art Food Photography</i>	<i>28</i>
Michael Baxandall's Patterns of Intentions	29
Study on Practices of Artists and their Food Photography	29
The Imaginative Inquiry	55
<i>The Research Diary: A Historical Background.....</i>	<i>56</i>
<i>Establishing the Bridge of Communication</i>	<i>56</i>
<i>Three Phases of Artist Interventions.....</i>	<i>57</i>
<i>Expired Food as a Form of Material and as Subject Matter.....</i>	<i>58</i>
<i>The Photography Process</i>	<i>59</i>

<i>My Research Diary: Documenting Photo Experiments</i>	60
Experiment 1 & 2: Photographing A Banana to Understand its Stereotypical Associations with Sexual Innuendos and Racial Connotations	60
Experiment 3 & 4: Photographing Oats and Indonesian Fried Rice in Response to the “Instagram Phenomenon”	65
Experiment 5: Photographing a Strawberry in an Uncommon Method to Comment on Reported News	67
Experiment 6 & 7: Photographing Oranges as a Chinese Cultural Object	68
Experiment 8: Photographing Yakult in an Abstract Manner	70
Experiment 9 & 10: Photographing Comfort Food, Sup Tulang Merah & Curry Batang Fish, in an Abstract Manner	71
Old is Gold: Food Photographs as Culture	76
<i>Food as Culture</i>	76
<i>Transition from Edible Food to Expired Food</i>	77
<i>Old is Gold #1</i>	79
<i>Old is Gold #2</i>	81
<i>Old is Gold #3</i>	82
<i>Old is Gold #4</i>	83
<i>Old is Gold #5</i>	84
Conclusion	88
References	91

Abstract

When the artist-photographer engages food as a subject matter in a photograph, the perception of the image goes beyond its physicality, thus enabling viewers to associate it with various conceptual and cultural meanings. This practice-led thesis discusses the dual role of food as both a material and subject matter in photographs. The study aims to answer the main question of how the use of food in photographs implicates its cultural meaning. This central question also leads to several sub-research questions: what are the approaches that photographers have taken in order to use food as a material; and in which ways can food be used as an artistic material to convey a sense of culture? This thesis employs the two modes of inquiry developed by Graeme Sullivan (2010): the “Intellectual” and the “Imaginative” mode of inquiry. Through the intellectual mode of inquiry, I examined two key issues: the challenges in using photography as a form of representational art due to the limitations of the camera medium, and whether photographs of food can ever be considered as fine art. This background research eventually served as contextual materials for my photo experiments where I developed a series of experimental photos using food as an artistic material. “Old is Gold” is the final series of experimental images that records my photographic journey in experimenting with the materiality of expired bread, inviting viewers to contemplate the materiality of expired food in photographs and to identify possible associations to any cultural meanings while consuming them visually and literally.

Keywords: Food, Photography, Fine Art, Practice-based research

Introduction

As an artist-photographer, I have been working with food and photography in the editorial and commercial industry for the past 7 years. These food photographs were created to attract viewers and persuade them to purchase and consume the photographed food products. Such food photographs normally present food in an attractive state, which is usually achieved with the use of highly saturated colours and styled with beautiful props to suggest an inviting dining environment. After dealing with editorial and commercial food photographs over a prolonged period, I begin reflecting on my own thought processes. With an existing editorial and commercial practice in food photography, I was able to master the art of producing photographs that were deemed successful for commercial and editorial purposes. In this process, however, I yearned to articulate my personal voice through the free exploration of food photography that truly reflected my own vision as a fine art photographer.

In my personal creation of food photographs, my work process is highly research-based and attempt to push the boundary between art and commerce. Like most photographers, I deliberately employ artistic elements in order to convey my artistic voice. For example, through the choice and composition of food, the use of other relevant props that surround the food, the colours and the mood of the food that are created by photo lighting and colour editing. Each of these elements embody different meanings, perhaps culturally significant to the creator of the photography (myself) and that make my food photographs personal and unique. On that note, I believe that commercial photographs of food that may be found in cookbooks and magazines should be distinguished from fine art photographs of food. This study seeks to investigate how fine art photographs of food coupled with existing systems of photographic practice could become a powerful tool for artistic exploration. Hence, this study employs methods that not only focus on visual experimentation but also deeply examines the background of food, culture, and medium-based practice as a whole. Within the broader context

of understanding the issues surrounding photography, food, and culture, I produced a new series of fine art photographs that experiment with the materiality of food and they serve as an embodiment of my cultural experiences with food in the context of contemporary Singapore.

Research Objectives

This practice-led project consists of an artistic inquiry that explores the use of food as both material and subject matter in photography. When food is used purely as a material in a photograph, we appreciate its formal properties such as the colours, textures or shapes that it represents. When engaged as a subject matter in photographs, food is no longer associated to just its physical attributes, but it is also associated with various conceptual and cultural meanings. This study aims to answer the main research question: How does the use of food in photographs implicate its cultural meaning? It also seeks to respond to the following sub-questions: what are the various approaches which photographers have undertaken in order to use food as a material in their artistic practices, and in which ways could food be used as an artistic material to convey a sense of culture?

This study pushes my practice as an editorial and commercial food photographer to reconsider different photography approaches in transforming food photographs into works of art while being aware of the possible cultural implications involved when photographing food. Often when we look at artworks, we are unable to access the thought process of the artist when creating them. In this practice-led research paper, I highlight the different stages which I have undertaken in pursuit of my artistic inquiry as an artist and a researcher. The transparency behind my artistic process may serve as valuable insights to anyone who is interested in creating fine art food photographs.

Research Methodology

This practice-led thesis employs the two modes of inquiry developed as a method of visual art research by Graeme Sullivan—the “Intellectual” and the “Imaginative” (2010). In

his book *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts*, Sullivan (2010) positions the role of an artist as a researcher and art works as the outcome of artistic research. The author offers an in-depth insight into art practice and argues that the creative and critical inquiry undertaken by artists in their creation, critique, and construction of knowledge is a form of research. The two modes of inquiry are complementary to one another, from which the artist's creative works emerge.

It was not common until recent years for the field to recognise the “studio” environment of an artist as a research platform for imaginative and intellectual inquiry or as a site with the potential to produce significant knowledge and understanding that is well grounded both socially and culturally (Sullivan, 2010). Recently developed art practice research methodologies have resulted in the emergence of different terminologies and frameworks to assist artists in theorising and articulating their practice as a form of research. Kristina and Seymour (Niedderer, 2007) have analysed these existing terminologies concerning the use of art practice in research and found them to be vaguely defined, which has led to multiple interpretations and purposes. Under these challenging circumstances, this thesis attempts to adopt theories and approaches suggested from visual art research methodologies (Sullivan, 2010) and artistic research methodologies (Hannula, Vadén, & Suoranta, 2014) to articulate and theorise my art practice as a form of research. According to Sullivan (2010), the visual art research methodology emphasises art practice as a form of research where inquiries are focused on the processes and products of the artist's intentions. This is only possible when the artist takes on both roles as a researcher and as the object of study. In Sullivan's argument on how an art practice can be considered as a form of research, he stated that it can be achieved when the artist undertakes critical and creative investigations in their working environment such as studios, galleries, community spaces or other working places.

Sullivan (2010) proposed that artists need to engage directly with theoretical concerns in their “studio” environments in order to theorize their inquiry and art practice into a form of research. The “studio” was referred to by Sullivan as a metaphorical place, which refers to the space and process where the artist-researcher engages with both theories and “works in progress” in relation to their topic of my interest and, ultimately present them in the form of an intellectual (thesis) and imaginative (practical component) inquiry.

Sullivan designed a visual framework that utilizes the relationships between various aspects of theory to theorize the different intellectual and imaginative phases in research practices (Sullivan, 2010). The three theorizing processes as part of the visual framework are: Problem-Finding, Meaning-Making and Create-Critique. They will serve only as guidelines throughout my research and can be used in different ways depending on the objective of the inquiry.

1. Problem-Finding: Problem-Finding involves identifying problems and solutions when exploring and conceiving ideas in an art-based environment. This theory can be applied in almost all stages of the research: The initial phase when the artist-researcher observes and identifies a problem towards the surroundings, then identifies fundamental questions as part of the literature review, and subsequently is used in theorizing part of the artistic process when the artist-researcher identifies problems and creates solutions in producing the artwork.
2. Create-Critique: Create-Critique connects the visual art practice and the critical dimensions by investigating theoretical research concerns through a process of creation and assessment of the artist-researcher’s envisioned ideas in response to specific topics and contexts. This theory will be mainly be used in theorizing the artistic process where experimental photographs are created and critiqued in the research diary.

3. Meaning-Making: Meaning-Making concerns theoretical issues surrounding the visual art practice and the interpretivist dimensions. They can be explored by constructing meanings and striving to establish a bridge of communication between an individual and the community. This system of meaning-making can be used to theorize the literature study on the fundamental questions and the survey on food photographs.

Sullivan (2010) has identified four kinds of reflexive practices to be used throughout in order to engage the existing theories and my practices from different perspectives and approaches so as to offer new ways of interpreting and developing the visual art research.

1. The inquiry process requires the visual arts researcher to be cognizant of the existing intellectual and contextual resources in order to develop any alternative conceptions and imaginative options in the practice. By adopting the self-reflexive practice in my research, I can satisfy my personal interest in art, food and photography, and create artworks as a visual arts researcher while being supported by the relevant literature studies and research knowledge in order to perform the inquiry process.
2. The reflexive practice is used as a response to the empirical studies I have conducted in theoretical research. In the following sections, I will demonstrate that I have contemplated the gathered data in order to develop alternative conceptions and the practical component in my practice. The nature of this reflexive practice is to focus on examining a couple of independent studies to gain new perspectives towards the same subject. An example of this reflexive practice will be the study of the food photographs by different artists to gain new perspectives on their differing approaches and to use them as references to cultivate alternative methods that would develop my own artwork.

3. In the subsequent sections, the reflexive practice was applied in my approach when I engaged in an open dialogue with the research findings in the literature studies and the experimental photos as part of the research diary. The purpose in this reflexive practice is to promote debates and back-and-forth discussions on these dialectic discourses and, eventually identify the significance of the meanings derived from the research findings.
4. The reflexive practice has been adopted as part of my inquiry as I investigate the contents and contexts of the fundamental questions raised in accordance to the research questions and the artistic process of creating works in the “studio” environment. By adopting the reflexive practice when performing this kind of problem-driven inquiry, it not only helps to identify problems but also help to open up a space for potential change as a response to the problem. An example of such inquiry will be the ethical considerations in my choice of using edible food as materials, which eventually render them inedible. The identified problem has led me to exploring other possible material choices such as expired food which resulted in an expanded research focus in approaching expired food both as a form of material and also as a subject matter.

Overview of Thesis

Following this introduction, this thesis will follow Sullivan’s mode of inquiry of the “Intellectual” and the “Imaginative” respectively. These two modes of inquiry ultimately articulate the process of my practice-led research into an academic research article. “The Intellectual Inquiry” delves into questions revolving around the limitations of the camera medium and the materiality of food in fine art photographs. “The Imaginative Inquiry” will discuss how I have applied Sullivan’s second mode of inquiry—the “Imaginative”—in this practice-led research project and will present key findings from the research diary that I have

used to document a series of experimental photos using food as an artistic material. In the process, I will also draw upon relevant background research into the expired food environment in Singapore, Instagram food photographs and food photography which represent embodiments of Singapore contemporary culture. These experiments will culminate in a final series of works, “Old is Gold”, which records my photographic journey in experimenting with the materiality of expired kaya bread. In this series of works, I invite viewers to contemplate the materiality of expired food in photographs and to identify possible associations to any cultural meanings while consuming them visually and literally. The conclusion will sum up some of my key reflections in embarking on the research process and highlight some potential areas for future research.

The Intellectual Inquiry

It is critical for me as an artist to understand the notions and boundaries of the primary elements involved in my art practice. Therefore, in the following sections, I engage in an intellectual inquiry into my research questions. This investigation can be theorised using two of the proposed dimensions of theory by Sullivan (2010), Problem-Finding and Meaning-Making, as a starting point to identify and address my theoretical concerns conceived in the form of several key concepts: fine art, photography, food and expired food. This section will discuss the two central issues that foreground my intellectual inquiry: the challenges in using photography as a form of representational art due to the limitations of the camera medium, and whether photographs of food can ever be considered as fine art.

Identifying the Challenges in using Photography as a Form of Representational Art

An investigation must be applied to the study of my choice of artistic medium, photography, and its relationship with the Visual arts. Roger Scruton (2013) claims that photography is limited because it cannot be considered a form of representational art, due to the camera's ability to capture reality as it is. As a counter argument, Scruton (2013) also proposed ways in which a photograph can be articulated as a work of art by fulfilling two specific conditions (which will be discussed in detail in the subsequent sections). By inquiring into theoretical concerns on the artistic capability of the photography medium and understanding its limitations, the insights garnered from this study informs my practice in engaging with the medium of photography.

Photography as Art

The camera is a powerful recording device that easily documents reality and is able to freeze moments in time for viewing pleasure in the future. This mechanical ability of the camera can also be related to its downfall as an artistic tool in the early history of photography.

Although photography eventually claimed its status in the Fine art realm, the challenges to create a Fine art photograph remains the same for any photographer. Therefore, the study on the history and the challenges in using the camera as an artistic medium will enable me to fully utilize its artistic potential when producing fine art photographs of food.

Scholars have argued that the notion of photography as a medium of evidential recording of reality gradually shifted towards becoming an artistic medium that can be imbued with cultural and personal meaning as seen in fine art photography (Deschin, 1960; Risatti & Trapp, 2007; Squiers, 2014). Scruton (2013) indicated that the notion of photography as art has been highly debated and challenged since its earliest days. It remained a scientific tool used to document reality until photographers began to approach the photographic medium as an artistic tool to develop their personal form of visual language (Scruton, 2013). The debate of whether or not the camera can be utilized as an artistic tool and whether photography could be considered as art continued until the 1960s (Hirsch, 2009; Marien, 2006). Scruton went on to argue that the photographic medium is limited due to its mechanical nature and its “success” in mirroring reality, which prevented the medium from becoming a form of representational art akin to painting. Since scholars similarly highlighted that representational art requires the work itself to be able to express thoughts (Deschin, 1960; Scruton, 2013; Sukonik, 2003), how can an artist-photographer produce images that fulfil such perplexing requirements? How does the limitations of the camera affect the process of creating a Fine art photograph? What are the other challenges in producing a photograph for it to be considered as a work of representational art? Hence, I begin to investigate the notion of fine art photography by first identifying the limitations of the camera medium in order to push beyond its boundaries as a scientific tool for documentary purposes, and eventually utilise its artistic potential to transcend the common status of transforming the representation of food into a work of art.

While the camera's limitation lies in its mechanical ability to mindlessly produce images that mirror reality, how is it possible for the artist to operate the medium distinctly and turn it into an artistic tool that can deliver a fine art photograph? Scruton (2013) proposed that a photograph can achieve the status as a work of representational art when it fulfils two criteria:

The image becomes articulate when (a) the maker of the image can seriously address himself to the task of communicating thought through the image alone, and (b) when the spectator can see and understand the image in terms of the process of thought which it expresses. To satisfy (a) we require a painterly approach to detail; to satisfy (b) we must distract the spectator's attention from the causal relation which is distinguishing feature of photography. Either way, the persistence of that relation - in other words, the persistence of the photographic image – can only hinder representation. It can contribute nothing to its achievement (p. 231).

In other words, the photograph on its own should be able to convey the artist's intention. This can be achieved by applying a "painterly approach" or some form of manipulation or intervention in different stages of the photography process to impose an artist intention onto the photographed subject. Moreover, the viewer needs to be able to recognise the photograph as a form of representational art and comprehend the artist's intentions. In order to accomplish the second criteria, Scruton proposed the need for the photographer to break away from the imprisonment of the causal relationship between the photographed subject and the viewer. Thus, in approaching the concept of photography as a form of representational art, I have narrowed down to analysing three significant relationships: the camera's relationship to mechanical materiality; the relationship between the artist's intention and the viewer's interpretation; and the photograph's relationship to notions of representation.

The Camera's Relationship to its Mechanical Materiality

According to Margaret Harker (1973), the camera has no discriminating power. She emphasized heavily on the mechanical nature of the camera in recording everything within the frame including all objects, details, background that surround the subject. Unless the artist-photographer purposefully arranges the frame, the camera alone is incapable of discerning which subjects were considered more significant or not. The mechanical nature of the camera enables the photographer to capture a wealth of details into one single image. When the camera records a moment in time, for instance a birthday party, the camera captures not only the happening (social interactions, movements, gestures) but also the physical environment around the event such as the type of birthday cake, the party props, the location or even unwanted details like the cake cutting knife that was lying on the edge of the table. This powerful ability of the camera highlights the danger of presenting unnecessary details in a fine art photograph since all exposed details or objects should contribute to the meaningful display of the artist's intention. Such as in the example of the birthday event, the cake on the table could be included in the photograph intentionally to elaborate on the mood of the joyous occasion as cakes are commonly associated to notions of celebration. However, if the cake cutting knife that was lying on the edge of the table had some blood stained on it spilling over the tablecloth, it could invite some thriller sensation contrasting to this joyous atmosphere. Hence, each of the photographed food subjects in my photo experiments were carefully curated, treated and composed within the frame to express some form of intention as they do not appear in the image by coincidence. The artist-photographer needs to be aware and ultimately bear responsibility for all minor details captured within the photograph as they could result in misperceptions from the viewers when appreciating the photograph as a work of art.

Harker's (1973) point on photography continues to shed light on the mechanical nature of photography, which was valued for the objectivity and truth properties the medium used to embody in the early twentieth century. This concept slowly evolved into a novel approach

towards the medium, which was conceptualized by leading artist-photographers such as Cindy Sherman and Sarah Charlesworth. For example, Cindy Sherman took self-portraits showing only herself, performing both as the subject and object in front of the camera. These self-portrait photographs of Cindy Sherman are not about herself but whoever she, as her own medium of representation has transformed (Carrier, 1998). For these artist-photographers, photographs were no longer perceived as precious objects encapsulating memories to be framed and hung at one's home. Instead, fine art photographs became powerful tools for their artistic exploration. This deliberate shift in the medium practice changed the perception of the role of photographs, from evidential records to works of art that embody artistic expression.

Relationship Between Artist's Intention and Viewer's Interpretation

This section responds to Scruton's (2013) second criteria for a photograph to achieve the status as a work of representational art: the role of the viewer. The viewer plays an important role for the photograph to be considered as a work of representational art, where he/she needs to be able to comprehend the artist's intentions and recognise the photograph as a fine art photograph. As mentioned previously, a photograph at the most fundamental level cannot be considered as a work of representational art because it simply illustrates Harker's (1973) point on the mechanical limitation of the camera medium. This concept of the straightforward photograph is akin to what Scruton termed as the "ideal" photograph, which is produced from using the camera purely as a tool of recording that documents an appearance of the actual subject and portrays it to be less interesting than the realization of the photographer's intention. Thus, Scruton (2013) suggested that in order for the viewer to recognise the image is a photograph as a representational form of art and understand the intention of the artist, the viewer needs to be able to realize this secondary pair of conditions: Firstly, it is necessary for the viewer to be aware that an "ideal" photograph is an exact copy of an appearance of some subject, and also, secondly, recognise that the "ideal" photograph is in a causal relationship

with that photographed subject and the artist's intentions (Scruton, 2013). In other words, if we refer to Scruton's first condition, the viewer should be able to identify whether or not, the photograph is an "ideal" photograph that directly portrays the photographed subject as a mirror to its reality self. The second condition necessitates the viewer to be aware on the notion of the causal relationship, its cultural implications and its connection between the "ideal" photograph and the photographed subject.

According to Scruton (2013), photography is often depicted in light of a causal relationship between the photographed subject and the viewer. Then he went on to explain about the history of debates involving successive attempts to break the causal relationship by which the artist-photographer is imprisoned within, and to impose an intention between the photographed subject and its appearance so that the subject can be both defined and viewed in terms of the imposed intention (Scruton, 2013). In this sense, the causal relationship refers to the connection between the "ideal" photograph and the photographed subject, and this exists when the photograph presents the photographed subject as a surrogate mirroring of its reality, similar to producing an "ideal" photograph. This refers to a scenario when the photographer chooses to use the camera purely as a recording tool. For example, when the "ideal" photograph depicts a banana as a subject matter, the photograph could merely record the likeness of the fruit, or alternatively the fine art photograph of a banana could embody some form of context that the artist photographer intended. (Refer to Figure 7, photograph of a black banana as an experiment in response to this concept.) Scruton's (2013) notion of the causal relationship also implicates on the importance of having the viewer appreciate fine art photographs in a cultural context, thus understanding the intentions of the artist. Not only the artist-photographer has to portray his/her artistic intention and convey it through the use of photography when photographing food, the viewer has to bear some responsibility and be informed of the cultural context in order for the photograph to be contemplated as a form of representational art. For

example, oranges can portray different significance when viewed in different forms of representation and cultural context. Oranges found in images of it served in a fruit basket as compared to the ones used to be presented as gift during Chinese New Year can portray different culturally specific meanings. The latter refers to an exchange of gifts representing happiness and abundance in Chinese traditions while the former refers to fruits to be consumed for its nutritional values. Inadequate knowledge will prevent the viewer from understanding the intentions of the artist-photographer when viewing these photographed oranges in the planned cultural context, thus disqualifying the photograph from being regarded as a representational work of art.

Once the viewer fulfils these two secondary conditions, he/she will be conscious of the differences between the two different genres of photograph: the notions behind the “ideal” photograph and the fine art photograph. As Scruton (2013) argues in his second criteria, for a photograph to achieve the status as a work of representational art, the viewer plays an important role in recognising the photograph as a form of representational art and through comprehending the intentions of the artist.

A Photograph’s Relationship to Notions of Representation

This section responds to Scruton’s first criteria for a photograph to achieve the status as a work of representational art: the photograph on its own should be able to convey the artist’s intention. Before the viewer is able to perceive the photograph as a form of representational art, understand the artist’s implied intentions, or differentiate it from an “ideal” photograph, the fine art photograph requires serious work from the artist-photographer. The efforts should fundamentally be able to convey the artist’s intention on its own and portray the photographed subject with different notions of representation from its reality self.

In order to achieve the first criteria in transforming a photograph into a form of representational art, Scruton (2013) suggested that the artist-photographer can apply a painterly

perspective during the process of photography and convince the viewer that the photographed subject is a representation of its original form and contexts. Scruton (2013) compared photography with painting to further elaborate on the relationship between the artist's intention and the viewer's interpretation. He argues that when one views a painting, the portrayed subject is not necessarily considered a perfect representation of its reality. Hence, the viewer may not take the portrayed subject literally for what it represents or what was represented to have existed in reality as according to the appearance of the painted subject (Scruton, 2013). According to Oscar Wilde (2001), this representation can possibly be rendered with an artist's intention:

every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter. The sitter is merely the accident, the occasion. It is not he who is revealed by the painter; it is rather the painter who, on the coloured canvas, reveals himself (p. 9) .

This may imply that when a viewer looks at the subject of the painting, the viewer may see what the painter has observed from the sitter or what the painter wants the viewer to perceive of the sitter. This act of manipulation indicates the artist's intention imposed on the reality during the painting process. Similarly, when photography has been demonstrated in a fine art context in the example of the banana photograph as mentioned earlier, when the viewer looks at a depiction of a banana in a fine art photograph, they may find the aesthetics, possible symbolisms or cultural associations as implied by the artist instead of seeing it as just a banana from anywhere else. In this thesis, I used food as a subject matter to push beyond its materiality, in order to convey a personal perspective that relates to the multicultural environment in which I live in. In another instance, the use of gold spray paint in my final series of experiments symbolises a renewed significance of value and celebration when applied on the expired food materials. The photo experiments documented in a later section of this thesis explore how different means of manipulation can assert an intentional relation between photography and the

food subjects and result in images which convey an artist's intention while being conscious of the role of the viewer's perspective when creating them.

Referring back to the example of the banana in a photograph (Figure 7), that photograph can be perceived differently as a fine art photograph if the viewer understood that the banana in the photograph is not presented as a surrogate of its reality but imposed with an artistic intention by various means of manipulation during the photography process. The resulting photograph of the banana which is photographed and presented to be coated in black, can be considered as a work of representational art, implying possible racial or sexual innuendos. This interpretation of the black banana as a representation of racial and sexual innuendos is also highly dependent of the viewer's cultural knowledge and if the photograph is appreciated with an educated eye. Due to the persistence of the causal relationship formed between the viewer and the photograph, the viewer's level of cultural knowledge might pose as an obstacle for photography to be considered as a form of representational art. It is essential for the artist to embrace and consider the viewer's perspective of the contents presented in the image when one is creating a fine art photograph. When a viewer recognizes a photograph as a form of representational art, this means the viewer understood that the artist's intention was successfully represented and integrated into the photographed subject. In this sense, the photographed subject can be manipulated in different ways in terms of its overall composition, the choice of background, the application of lighting or various forms of post-editing treatment. Scruton (2013) proposed that fine art photographs can be denatured like performing a photo montage on the photographs. A photo montage is a manipulation of photographs by putting them together to form a different perspective from the images combined. This process of manipulation that takes place after a photograph has been taken can be seen as an artist's intervention, and an attempt to present the photographed subject in a different perspective with artistic intention. For example, in Experiment 4 (See Figure 10), I experimented with the

recommended digital manipulation by using multiple photo montages to embody my artistic response to the repetitive acts and countless efforts of Instagram photographers around the world. Food choices and props in this image also served as a form of contextual materials with the purpose of visually informing the viewers that it is the depiction of a meal-time scene.

In summary, if photography were to be applied in a literal manner as a mirror of reality, it cannot then claim to be a form of representational art. First, it is necessary for the fine art photograph to display the photographed subject in a manner that embodies the artist-photographer's intention. Secondly, the viewer needs to be able to differentiate an ordinary photograph and a fine art photograph, and to understand the artist's intentions implied from the photograph. Following this approach, the artist-photographer can then escape from the imprisonment of the causal relationship and successfully produce a fine art photograph. The art of photography is a complicated process and can involve various manipulations to convey an artist's intention through the photographed subject to its viewer. After all, Scruton (2013) did argue that in order for photography to be a form of representational art and produce images which are not surrogates of reality, one must intervene in the causal relationship between the photographed subject and the viewer. As part of the study for the imaginative inquiry in the later experiments, I will elaborate further as I test different methods of manipulation at various stages of the photography process where I attempt to convey my artistic intentions on the image using food as my material.

From the artist-photographer's end, fine art photography requires the photographed subject to be represented in a different perspective for it to be seen as a form of representational art. This leads to the question of how can I engage with food as a material with a different perspective to create an artwork? In order for food photography to be perceived as works of art, the photographed food subject should be portrayed differently from its fundamental role as a source of sustenance. This representation should embody my artistic intentions and be

achieved using various manipulations in the photography process such as photo manipulations. Furthermore, I am arguing that photographs of food as works of art are embedded with cultural implications in terms of the camera's relationship to its mechanical materiality, the relationship between the artist's intention and the viewer's interpretation, and the photograph's relationship to its notions of representation. The role of an artist-photographer (myself) ultimately consists of acquiring resources from different mediums and crafts, theoretically, metaphorically, or physically, to produce a work of art. I am referring to the possibilities in engaging with food to create photographs as an artist-photographer in the same way a painter would use paint and paintbrushes as tools to create a painting, in an attempt to transform food into a work of art.

Studies on Fine Art Food Photography

In the following section, I will further explicate how photography can be translated into a work of art by examining the artistic practices of five selected photographers. As mentioned in the previous section, the perception of photography as a work of art are informed by three significant relationships: the camera's relationship to mechanical materiality; the relationship between artist's intention and the viewers' interpretation; and the photograph's relationship to its notions of representation.

The intellectual inquiry extends to the survey on food as a form of materials in photographs based on the fine art platform. Food in photographs has commonly been seen as displaying food intended for consumption (Bright, 2017). Whether they remained to be part of the dining experience in photographs will largely depend on the intentions of the photographer and how they were presented in the photograph. (cookbooks, for example) According to Sullivan (2010), studies of the practices of artists can reveal a deep understanding of their creative minds, which can serve as useful artist references when I am creating the artwork. I surveyed works by five photographers—Edward Weston, Jan Groover, Martin Parr, Lorenzo Vitturi and Robert Zhao—based on Michael Baxandall's proposed method of analysis, which

consists of three essential elements: Culture, Charge and the Brief (Baxandall, 1985). This method of analysis provides a logical approach to understand the intentions of the photographers when using food as a form of material in their photographs (Baxandall, 1985).

Michael Baxandall's Patterns of Intentions

A picture speaks a thousand words. Each artwork bears a part of the consciousness from the artist who created them. According to Baxandall (1985), artworks can be seen as a set of solutions created by the artists. By understanding the artist's intentions and the thoughts behind each decision that contributes to the making of an artwork, it is possible to gain valuable insights that can serve as inspiration when creating artworks. In Baxandall's (1985) book titled *Patterns of Intentions*, he proposed a set of logical approaches in an attempt to analyse the artist's intentions behind an artwork. His method emphasises the practical problems faced by the artists and the practical reasoning used to solve them. Baxandall's proposed method of analysis consists of three essential elements: Culture, Charge and the Brief. Culture is in an interpenetrative relationship with Brief and Charge. When analysing the artwork, the notion of Culture involves background information about the artist, and an analysis of the context of existing art movements or the surrounding environment of the artist. Charge refers to the broad task that was directed to the artist. Unless the task (the artwork) is a commissioned piece of work, otherwise in most occasions where the artwork is produced as a personal work, this Charge is often defined by the artists for themselves. Charge can also be referred to as the overall motivation of the artist as to why he/she is creating the artwork. The Brief normally consists of local conditions wherein the Charge gets translated into a given context. It refers to a set of (conceptual/technical) problems the artists set for themselves when answering to the Charge. The solutions to these problems then become a part of the artwork itself.

Study on Practices of Artists and their Food Photography

The survey of food photographs found on fine art platforms adopts Baxandall's method of analysis and studies food photographs from five different fine art photographers: Edward Weston, Jan Groover, Martin Parr, Lorenzo Vitturi and Robert Zhao. These artists are selected for various reasons: first, they are engaged with the camera medium; second, they use food as a material in their photography; and third, they convey their artistic intentions through the engagement of the medium and of the material. Baxandall's method is in particularly pertinent to this study because it emphasises the practical problems faced by artists and the practical reasoning used to solve them. The analysis of the intentions of these fine art photographers using food as materials in their artwork inspires and informs my artistic process in using expired food as a form of material in my own artwork.

This section focuses on analysing food photographs from selected fine art photographers in order to study the intentions of the artist when using food as material in their artworks, and how they developed creative solutions to overcome related problems when conveying a certain intention through the photographed subject. The analysis and insights gained from this spectrum of survey eventually serves as inspiration and references to inform and inspire my artistic process documented in the later sections of this thesis, when conceiving and creating art using food as a form of material and eventually also my subject matter in photographs. Among the five proposed photographers, some are more concerned about form while others may be more concerned about space or cultural identity. In other words, their approaches towards food vary from using it purely as a material to conduct studies of form and space to using them as representations of broader themes and ideas such as national identity or race.

When a camera is used as an artistic tool of representation, it is viewed as a device which is able to present a surrogate of the photographed subject's reality. Following this perspective, many fine art photographers have integrated the use of food into an artwork by

portraying food not just for its nourishment value but utilizing food as an artistic material. In other words, food have been used as a material in photographs for different purposes and sometimes form a specific visual language native to the photographer, expressing food differently from its edible function. According to Fiore (2018), there are two schools of thought for the purpose of using food as material in paintings. Firstly, through the symbolic use of food to convey certain cultural values, such as rotting fruits may have been used to represent Christian religious traditions. Secondly, food can be used as a form of still life for painters to showcase their skills in using an array of visual effects to present banquet scenes. Fine art photographers have similarly presented food in their photographs and have demonstrated similar “thoughts” when handling food as a material to convey their artistic intentions through different methods.

Edward Weston. Edward Weston’s photographic approach was largely motivated by his interest in the pure form of the object and his rejection of pictorialism in the 1930s, which was popular then. The photograph titled, *Pepper No. 30* (See Figure 1) was photographed with defining contours and details by focusing on the formal qualities of pepper using natural light and a cylindrical funnel. Weston mechanically altered his equipment by making his lens aperture stop at $f/240$, whereas the smallest aperture stops of the commercially manufactured large format camera can only be as small as $f/64$. The smaller aperture creates the greater depth of field. The pepper was used by Weston as subject matter for its formal qualities.

Figure 1. Edward Weston (1930). Pepper No.30. Retrieved from

<https://www.sfmoma.org/artwork/39.208>

Culture. As mentioned previously, Weston did not believe in pictorialism, a photography movement that flourished in the 1930s (Marien, 2006). According to Marien (2006), the pictorialists were a group of photographers looking to raise the level of photography to that of Fine art. They considered themselves as more than “snap shooters” and believed that photographers should be able to produce aesthetic and spiritual fulfilling works beyond the simple mechanical means and the documentary function of the camera. Pictorialist photographers saw themselves not only as practitioners who aimed their camera and took photographs, but also as artists who composed the shot and used other techniques or processing equipment to print images in order to realize their vision (Campbell, 2017). Marien (2006) states that Weston went to join a group named f.64 which later issued a manifesto on their photography approach:

The members of group f.64 believe that photography, as an art-form, must develop along lines defined by the actualities and limitations of the photographic medium, and

must always remain independent of ideological conventions of art and aesthetics that are reminiscent of a period and culture antedating the growth of the medium itself (p. 270-271).

This manifesto reflected both the group's and Weston's common interest in the rejection of pictorialism. It could also be seen that the f.64 group developed some sense of modernism in their manifesto. Modern artists subscribed to aesthetic formalism, where they produced works that emphasized form over content. Modernists believed in pure forms that could transcend the differences in content and square off as important as the subject matter itself. They left behind the soft moody look of pictorialism in favor of the harder and direct approach. (Hirsch, 2009). Weston, at that point in time, chose to reject all pictorialist beliefs and went on to push the limitations of the photographic medium and made the decision to focus on photographing nothing but the beauty of his chosen objects. The play of light and shadow on the surface of the food in Weston's photographs had transformed them into works that emphasize purely on form.

Charge. Art historian Shelley Rice (1976) said of Edward Weston's work, that "The artist (Weston) verbally described these works as "objective" revelations of pure form, straight photographic reproductions devoid of interpretation or manipulation." Weston was one of the early photographers from the 1930s who used photography to document and observe the formal qualities of food in its purest form. According to Susan Bright (2017), Weston chose these food subjects solely for their photographic potential and forms which have no associations to any specific genre of still life or having any form of art historical connotations.

Brief. The process of Weston's photography approach in photographing the pepper using natural sunlight was revealed in his own writings:

I tried the light from the opposite side in the next morning light – brilliant sun through muslin. Better! And more failures.... But the pepper is well worth all the time, money,

effort.... It is beginning to show signs of strain and tonight should grace a salad. It has been suggested that I am a cannibal to eat my models (Allen, 2006, p. 1).

Weston photographed as many as 44 peppercorns in an attempt to get a satisfactory shot of it (Allen, 2006). In this arduous process, he attempted to photograph the pepper using sunlight as his only light source. The application of this lighting approach implies that the lighting condition on the pepper changes as the sun gradually moved across the sky. The result of this movement of light can be seen from the streak of strong highlights running across the contours of the pepper, which helped to enhance and define the form of the pepper. As a modernist photographer, Weston conforms to the study of the subject from an aesthetic perspective, in terms of shapes and forms of the object. Weston could have faced a problem in portraying the pepper in a different perspective from what the pictorialists would have done: the blurry and soft moody look. Therefore, his approach in the way light was used is an important aspect to inform us of his solutions to the problems faced when developing the series of pepper photographs. On 3rd August 1930, Weston was not satisfied with his previous images of the pepper. "I still had the pepper which caused me a week's work. I had decided I could go no further with it, yet something kept me from taking it to the kitchen, the end of all good peppers" (Allen, 2006). Then he came up with the idea to photograph the pepper by placing it inside a funnel which allowed the funnel to reflect light on the important contours of the pepper. This might be due to the limitation in the movements of the sun, as the light moves across the pepper chronologically, some parts of the pepper remaining in darkness throughout the session. This could be the important contours missing from the pepper shots that Weston had not managed to capture previously. The cylindrical shape of the funnel also functioned as a diffuser for the light so that it can be softly diffused onto the pepper while the highlight on the important contours can still be achieved over a long exposure following the chronological movements of the sunlight.

Aside from the lighting, Weston also faced another problem when photographing the peppers. As one of Weston's approach in photography was to capture the maximum detail of the subject, he was unable to achieve it with his view camera. The depth of field gets narrower as the camera moves closer to the subject. In order to photograph the small pepper completely in focus from a close distance, Edward figured that he required an extremely small aperture. His grandson, Kim Weston, explained that his grandfather designed his own stops for his lens, which eventually resulted in f/240 aperture. This extremely small aperture will overcome the focusing issue and also required 4-6 hours of exposure to expose the famous *Pepper No.30* adequately (Zhang, 2017).

Food in Weston's photographs demonstrates how food has been photographed as a form of material and transcended its original function as being associated as a source of nourishment. Food to Weston was purely about objects of different outlines and textures. In view of this preference, Weston had to search for suitable food and apply a photographic approach that is capable in capturing its beautiful formal properties such as lines, shapes or forms. As observed from the bell pepper in Figure 1, it served solely as a material for him to conduct his study of forms. Following this perspective and focus on aesthetic beauty, Weston's approach in photography, using maximum depth of focus, natural sunlight and a black background was able to successfully diminish the bell pepper's original function as an object of nourishment for the body and focus on its form instead. It was not necessary to build a new lens to expand the range of apertures to increase the depth and details in the photograph as they can alternatively be achieved in the post- production photograph phase that uses digital manipulations such as focus stackings. Weston's creative use of sunlight as the only light source to define forms and shapes of food should also be considered as a possible lighting solution in the artistic process later on. The same bell pepper would now no longer be visually seen as a food ingredient but visually consumed as how one would view a sculpture that displays beautiful formal qualities.

One of the greater challenges I face when photographing food is to portray it in a different perspective apart from its usual nutritional properties. Weston's photographic approach in his use of light, shadow, depth, dark background and the choice of a monochromatic mood has greatly influenced my series of photo experiments as I attempt to transform food from its original state into a work of art.

Jan Groover. The way Jan Groover photographed food in her photographs shares several parallel intentions and approaches with Weston, yet it is evident that food served very different functions in their photographs. Groover used food as a material for study, but her focus is mainly on space and the norms in photography practice. Her work is not entirely free from symbolisms like Weston, and there is a subtle feminist subtext implied in them. *Untitled* (See Figure 2), is a result of Jan Groover's rebellious nature as an artist, going against the norms in photography and contemporaneous trends. As Groover (1990) mentioned in her book *Pure Invention*, she used food as an object of study in this work to express her rejection of symbolism embodied by the knife and the idea of the need to present her works with any meanings. Groover critiqued that in the academic environment, students are often questioned about his/her intentions in an artwork. She commented that such an approach is almost unacceptable or rhetorical for the answer to be "no meaning" or "the intention is to have no intention" in such cases. These answers and attitude could easily lead the student to be judged as being "lazy" or "rebellious" in nature. It required a certain depth of knowledge and confidence to attempt such "rebel" acts in the creation and presentation of one's artwork.

Figure 2. Jan Groover (1985). Untitled. Retrieved from https://www.moma.org/collection/works/49439?artist_id=2358&locale=en&page=1&sov_referrer=artist

Culture. Jan Groover photographed food as part of a constructed scene in the 1970s. She is an important contemporary artist with a focus on forms and constructed photography to produce images that are highly intimate. According to Susan Bright (2017), her food images were created in a contrived manner to ensure that there were no signs of symbolism. Photography in the 1970s entered a new era of postmodernism (Hirsch, 2009). The term postmodernism was first used around 1970 and embraced much of the developments in art which followed into the 1990s, including Conceptual art. Postmodernism was born from skepticism. It rejected the traditional focus on the importance of the subject matter and the “correct” application of materials when making an image. Edward Weston’s focused on the importance of his subject matter by studying its formal qualities and applying photography to his subject in a strict manner. Groover adopted a totally different approach. In an interview, Groover (1990) explained her intentions behind her photographic approach:

I was probably getting rid of a lot of conceptual stuff, thinking I had to be right about something, and know what I was right about, and you don't have to be right, and you don't have to say it. It's not a verbal experience (p. 11).

Postmodern artists such as Groover challenged the modernist notion that there is a single truth to experience. They advocated against any notion of having artistic intention, references or meaning to their work. Postmodernists valued the interpretation of the individual experience over abstract principles. While modernists focused on achieving simplicity and clarity in their works, postmodernists embraced the sophisticated and often contradictory layers of meanings. Groover and her photographic works were a perfect fit for the postmodernism movement.

Charge. Jan Groover formed an intimate relationship with food in her photographic works as the meanings to these images were only accessible to herself. This personal relationship can be evident in the way she composed food as a form of still life and visual expression in her images. Groover (1990) quoted an example of how she perceived food and objects:

Now some objects have bigger attitudes. An apple could have a big attitude, depending upon what it sits with. A lemon has somewhat of a private-language attitude because Manet did a beautiful painting of a lemon. Then there are some objects like bottles that are containers, and its containership means something. I don't know what it means, quite. So building up still life to have all these characters- I don't know what the sentences are, but I know the sentences make sense to me, when they make sense (p. 11).

According to Bright (2017), Groover's works are mainly about space, illusion and challenging the limitations of photography. In Figure 2, *Untitled* (1985), Groover photographed an image of an onion with a knife on the chopping board. Groover did not explore the different

focus planes of the 4x5 camera when she bought it in 1978. Until one day, she declared “I really am going to do this today. I’m just going to make a picture using just one point of focus” (Groover, 1990, p. 14). The problem identified in this work was revealed in her declaration in using one point of focus. This problem not only came across as a technical challenge, but also served as a proof of her manifesto in challenging the norms of the modernist approach in photography. She created *Untitled* from this idea she had when she got the 4x5 camera seven years previously. One of the reasons she chose to photograph fruit was her belief that each object has a specific kind of physical characteristic and this understanding can come from observing fruit.

Brief. In Figure 2, Jan Groover played with the focus plane of the large format camera and created focal point sliced down the middle of the image from the knife to the onion. Since Groover was well aware of the symbolic or metaphoric references to the knife, she understood that the knife expresses aggression and threatening meanings, yet she intentionally chose to make the tip of the knife out of focus so that it does not look instinctively aggressive. She also mentioned that “They (the objects) talk to each other, and it’s either one special relationship or the other, that I don’t know how to talk about. But I know it’s there.” (Groover, 1990, p. 12). Groover was trying to build a relationship between the onion and the knife within the image by experimenting with compositions. The focus on the image lies within this special relationship she constructed on the table: the onion and knife were props positioned in a particular and unique manner that managed to “speak” to Groover. Despite Groover having previously mentioned that her images are highly personal and devoid any meaning, she might have implied a personal notion of the feminist subtext in her choice of using the kitchen environment and food as part of the image. In this case, the chopping board, the knife and the onion in Figure 2 would appear to be a typical scenario hinting at a woman preparing a meal in the kitchen during her time. In other words, any object that has the stereotypical associations

to the traditional role of women in the household (specifically kitchen in this case) and physically occupy space within the photograph, would have been considered to be part of her work. Since the problem in her work deals with spatial or compositional studies, her use of a wider perspective and compositional experiments with objects or food within the space itself portrayed across as solutions in her artwork.

Jan Groover wanted to get away with composing an important object (which could have been anything) within the image and have it not really mattered in the end. Groover did not believe in the need to come up with reasons to justify her process of artistic creation, and she did not perceive photographs in a normal way. In order for Groover to address her problem in expressing her rebellious attitude towards the “correct” way of photographing, she chose to not focus on the presumably important object which is the knife in this image. In this image, the onion in the background functioned as an “escape” for Groover. Her rebellious expressions have aligned with behavior as identified in the postmodernism movement in many ways. I argue that there the postmodernist movement had asserted some form of influence on Groover’s artistic process, and likewise the movement had an impact of other artists who exhibited such behaviour. According to Jan Groover herself, she noticed that people loved her previous still life works in color. She found two problems with this observation. First, she felt that her work was devalued when people liked her work. Second, she should not be producing works for people to like them. Therefore, her rebellious attitude motivated her to produce black-and-white photographs instead of colour photography (Groover, 1990).

According to Jan Groover (1990), she described her works mostly as “formalist”, referring to her focus on detailed elements and in the construction of the image itself. It is evident in Groover’s work that she paid attention to the formal qualities of the photographed objects similarly to what Edward Weston had done but she denied being influenced by his work. Her works sought to create an artistic tension between form and content whereas

Weston's works focused only on the form itself. Groover's independent and unique approach to picture-making cemented her position in the postmodernist world as she reaffirmed the idea that the function of food in her images existed without meaning other than to serve as a study of the relationships and the artistic tensions between objects depicted in her still life photographs.

In Groover's works, food is used as objects to conduct compositional studies within the space of the photographs. As compared to Weston's works, they were not composed in an objective manner where the subject would strictly be composed at the centre of the image. Instead, Groover experimented and formed interesting compositions using food and kitchen accessories. Among other images in this series, most of them were also photographed in the kitchen environment which included food ingredients and kitchen equipment. The common elements found in the different photographs inevitably drew a subtle hint to the existing traditional role of women confined in the household which was prevalent in her time. As Groover's rebellious attitude also exists as one of the "problems" implied in her work, she solved or responded to it with her play with the focus plane, challenging the norm in technicalities such as her choice of focus and her intimate relationship with food in her images that she was not concerned with the public's impression of her.

My experiments were inspired by Groover's interesting compositional studies and her rebellious artistic attitude when creating them. As her works fundamentally seek to reject the norm of what the masses prefer during her time, she took feedback about her works seriously in order to develop them in a contradictory direction (Groover, 1990). Groover's rebellious spirit encouraged me to find courage in resisting the favoured norms and advance towards creating a body of visually contrasting works.

Martin Parr. While Groover mainly used food as a subject to study space and serve as hints toward a feminist subtext, Martin Parr applies the snapshot aesthetics in his food

photographs and focuses on using food as a cultural material used to represent a nation's identity. Parr is notable for his use of snapshot aesthetics and clichés when crafting his intentions into photographs such as *Untitled & Mexico* (See Figure 3 & 4). It normally involves a mixture of mundane subjects and seemingly traditional techniques with a contemporary twist such as using snapshot aesthetics as a deceptive device. Most of the images contain semiotic devices such as colors and food representative of specific cultures and national identity.

Figure 3. Martin Parr (1983-1985). *Untitled*. Retrieved from

<https://metalmagazine.eu/en/post/article/feast-for-the-eyes-a-yummy-exhibition>

Culture. Martin Parr's work can be perceived as a merger of art, journalism and documentary photography. Cultural historian Stuart Hall contemplated the causes that motivated the shift away from traditional documentary photography in the late 20th century (Marien, 2006). Stuart speculated that some photographers and artists no longer trusted photography as a pure mode of documentation of reality. This phenomenon has led to the current mixture of photojournalism, documentary work, art photography as well as staged photographs (Marien, 2006). According to Timothy (2011), Parr's photography is unexpectedly complex despite the photograph appearing simple on the surface. The directness of Parr's image and his snapshot aesthetics does not usually invite viewers to contemplate the

image aesthetics, therefore the content must be understood and be viewed collectively in order to fully appreciate the images (Timothy, 2011).

Charge. Martin Parr used “ordinary” food and the way they were presented to reveal national identity. To Parr, food played an important role as an indicator of difference or similarity in not just taste but also the appearance. Timothy states that, “Parr does not view food as a transported product of globalization (because people are transported, and food is local). The tourist is the explorer, and the food is a mystery waiting to be discovered” (Timothy, 2011, p. 54). As part of his motivation to present a nation’s identity in his photography works, it is highly likely that he associated certain objects as representations of specific cultures. The answers to these questions eventually led him to specific choices of food subjects that appear in his photographs.

Brief. According to Timothy (2011), when Martin Parr photographed his subject, he used the aesthetics of a snapshot as a deceptive device in order to present his image from an objective perspective. The snapshot aesthetic can be characterised by the use of direct flash, saturated colours and informal angles. The use of the snapshot aesthetic can also be viewed as Parr’s attempt at borrowing the notion of “spontaneity” and the “raw” qualities of photographs to portray the illusion that his “objective” images were captured in an instance without any implied intentions.

Martin Parr utilises the flash technique not only to achieve a snapshot aesthetic but to convey his fascination with objects of culture such as food (Timothy, 2011). By using the flash technique when photographing the subject, the light focuses on the subject in the frame and tends to expose it slightly brighter than its surrounding. In this manner, he is able to express his fascination and draw attention to the subject.

According to Bright (2017), Martin Parr used clichés in his photography to portray food and express his opinions on national identity. For example, Parr sought to use clichés of

“ordinary” food such as Fish and Chips to remind us of British identity. Timothy (2011) identified Martin Parr applying a similar use of clichés in *Untitled* (See Figure 3) and *Mexico* (See Figure 4), where Parr had chosen to photograph hot dog buns, which are a big part of American’s food culture and therefore can be seen as equivalent to America. In Timothy’s (2011) study on Martin Parr’s 2006 photobook, he concluded Parr had to conduct studies into the role of food within the context of different cultures before he can use them as to establish the relationship between food and identity in his works.

Figure 4. Martin Parr (2002). Mexico, Merida. Retrieved from <https://pro.magnumphotos.com/Package/2K1HRG6S7S7S>

Timothy (2011) has claimed that this photograph *Mexico, Merida* (See Figure 4) is an example which reveals Parr’s approach to photography. Timothy observed the excessive palate of greens set against the background of red and white checkered tablecloth as a display that implied a strong hint of Mexican identity. This can be seen as a deliberate decision in photographing subjects of selective colours to represent a nation’s identity and through his enhancement on the red and green in the image, which reflects his emphasis on the important role of using colours to convey the idea of culture and identity (Timothy, 2011).

It can be observed that the challenge Martin Parr would have faced in creating his works was enabling the food in his images to depict a nation's identity. In response to this issue, Parr had to carry out necessary research to understand a nation's culture before proceeding to photograph his series of images with that specific intention in mind. This is evident in his understanding and choices of food to be photographed as seen in Figure 3, as the hot dogs and sauces can almost be immediately associated to the popular American food culture. Likewise, in Figure 4, the photograph demonstrates Parr's conscious effort in curating the choice of colours in the photograph to coincide with the green, red and white colours that would connect the viewers to the national colours of a Mexico flag. Since most photographers crave to develop an aesthetic that is highly personalised or unique in some manner, Parr's snapshot aesthetic can also be perceived as a solution to develop works with a more personal touch.

Food in Parr's photographs represent some sense of social responsibility to convey a nation's identity when compared to Weston and Groover who convey an interest towards the formal qualities of food or using it as a study of compositional space. His use of snapshot aesthetics that consist of direct flash, saturated colours and informal angles help Parr to break away from the imprisonment of the causal relationship between his photographed food subjects and the viewers. Otherwise, the palate of green against the bright red table cloth in Figure 4, would have looked like an ordinary image of limes and soup in an ordinary setting without these enhancements. The clichés that Parr used to photograph in representing a nation's identity is significant as they are curated by informed choices of colours and food dishes to associate the viewers visually with a specific culture.

As my interest lies in engaging with expired food as both a material and subject matter in photography, Parr's photographic approach serves to be a pivotal reference which emphasised the importance of research work, how photographs of food can be treated as a deceptive tool and the significance of colours as a semiotic device.

Lorenzo Vitturi. Lorenzo Vitturi shares a similar interest towards representing culture using food but executed in a vastly different approach from Parr. Vitturi presents food in his photograph in the form of a still life study with a dose of “randomness” and complements his food photographs with portraiture to extensively represent the community from Dalston market. Vitturi treated food like any other objects he found in the market, as they served as materials to represent the rich diversity of culture that embodied within the market and as artistic materials for him to conduct still life studies and experiment with his notion of randomness within the work. The notion of randomness plays a critical role which contributed to the success of Vitturi’s work. It was through his experimentations with food as materials through his still life studies, which resulted in the transformation of an originally mundane photograph into an interesting and aesthetically enticing one. The addition of portraiture to the original still life studies in *Yellow Chalk #1* and *#2* (See Figure 5) serve as good examples on how the perspective towards a subject matter (Dalston market) can be widened by using more than one mode of representation.

Figure 5. Lorenzo Vitturi (2013). *Yellow Chalk #1 & #2*. Retrieved from

<http://www.trendtable.com/27226-the-art-of-assemblage/>

Culture. Lorenzo Vitturi was previously a cinema set painter and designer who transited into photographic works with installation and sculpture (Trotter, 2014). During the time before he began photographing markets, a newspaper reported the unhygienic conditions of the Dalston market which drew many journalists and photographers (Photoworks, 2016). The situation worsened with the release of an inaccurate report which stated that people from the market community were allegedly eating rat meat. This report was probably lost in translation because rat meat had not been consumed. The meat that was consumed may have looked like rat meat but was actually an African delicacy. As a result, the market community began to respond aggressively towards journalists and photographers. At first, the locals refused to allow their photos to be taken but Vitturi spent time there to gain their trust by sharing with them what he was doing and what his ideas were. Vitturi did manage to photograph the locals which gave him the opportunity to get closer to the community when he exchanged photos and talked with them.

Charge. According to Bright (2017), Vitturi explored the potential for dual readings implied within the images of food during the 2010s, in terms of the exotic and ordinary, local and foreign. In his book *Dalston Anatomy*, Vitturi was interested in people and the Dalston neighbourhood which were about to face drastic changes in their lives. *Yellow Chalk #1 & #2* (See Figure 5) is part of the “Dalston Anatomy” photo series, which he photographed portraits and still life of food as a visual homage to the Ridley Road Market. This Ridley Road market in East London was known to have retained a specific blend of African, Turkish, and British influence despite going through numerous renovations. Vitturi discovered the market to be a special place where different cultures were blended together in celebration of its diversity and life. Thus, he was motivated to photograph the market before it was revamped (Vitturi, 2013).

Brief. In Vitturi’s works, he mentioned that there were no narratives nor a single story as they were created with one main objective in mind: a visual homage to Ridley Road Market.

As shown in Figure 5, Vitturi composed his still life in an interesting arrangement consisting of a coconut husk and possibly sweet potatoes along with some other found objects from the market. Vitturi might have identified the problem of creating interesting and unique still life images which eventually influenced him to experiment with the collected objects in a random manner and embraced “randomness” as part of his creating process. Vitturi used food in his works to convey a sense of culture and elevate its status to the same importance as other found objects in his collection that were photographed. The coconut husk in Figure 5 has an equal significance to its other counterparts as part of the still life image as they served to inform viewers about the possible cultures that could have existed in the Ridley Road Market. Vitturi could have been previously attracted to the coconut husk as it carried some cultural information about the market while displaying an interesting odd shape that would be useful for him upon creating the still life image as seen in Figure 5. This can be perceived as a solution for Vitturi to associate his still life with cultural contents that documents heritage of the Dalston market.

Moreover, Vitturi might have realized a secondary problem or limitation to his still life images which eventually persuaded him to extend his series to a two-image montage that includes an additional mixed media portrait to complement his existing still life to provide a wider perspective of the communities from the market. For example, the still life images of the coconut husks and found objects from the market in Figure 5, were accompanied with portraits of interesting characters who Vitturi met on the street (Photoworks, 2016). Vitturi’s portraiture served three main purposes: first, to complement the still life photos to provide a more holistic perspective of the market; second to build a closer relationship with the locals; and third to function as a storytelling device. Vitturi was told by the people in the market that chinks were sold to pregnant African women as painkillers which inspired him to create a series of portraits of women with faces covered in chalk as a means of creating awareness of their plight (Trotter,

2014). The portraits not only served to bridge the distance between Vitturi and the community but also incorporated hidden stories.

According to an interview, Vitturi revealed that he created his work in an ironic environment which reassembled both the negative aspects and the energetic, multicultural environment of the market (Trotter, 2014). Although he recognised that Dalston market was going through gentrification which generated many negative effects on the communities living there, he chose to respond to this situation artistically by creating works that display an affectionate humour and a sense of melancholy. Both characteristics can be evident in his play with the found objects and his vibrant choice of colours.

Vitturi's works has motivated me to experiment and photograph in a less rigid manner and to experiment with food as a cultural material with a notion of randomness. His inclusion of portraits to the still life images of food have broadened my perspectives towards the possibility and advantages in using photo montage to represent or expand the boundaries of what a singular food image can achieve.

Robert Zhao. The final artist in this survey on fine art photography platform also expressed similar interests towards using food as a cultural material. Food in Robert Zhao's photographs carry unusual forms and cultural contexts that enables him to create interesting images which convey fictional tales. His works engage with the nature of photography as a medium of truth to document reality, while simultaneously including methods of falsification, various visual strategies and complementary text to communicate his artistic intention to his viewers. Through photography, Zhao wishes to invite the viewer to look at his photographs critically and raise questions about their ideals and ideas of nature. He often chooses subjects that are often overlooked or have interesting aesthetics as in the case of the square-shaped apple in *Square apple, Plate 22* (See Figure 6), which is part of a series of works titled "A Guide to the Flora and Fauna of the World".

Figure 6. Robert Zhao(2013). Square apple, Plate 22. Retrieved from <https://www.criticalzoologists.org/guide/22.html>

Culture. In an interview conducted by Chng (2009), Robert Zhao revealed that he is highly influenced by Walid Raad, whose works are based on the definition of the blurred boundaries between truth and fiction. Walid perceived truth as manipulated elements which turned it into fiction, and fiction as historical phenomenon which transformed them ultimately into a fact. Zhao refers to the context of writing history which has been perceived as being written by historians, but yet can also be interpreted as highly fictionalised and manipulated accounts like most documentaries today (Chng, 2009). Like dramatic works of art, history has the potential to be over-sensationalised too. The inherent nature of photography alludes to the idea that every image taken may appear to be a documentation of reality. While explaining his intentions in creating works that involves a mix of fact and fiction, Robert Zhao made the following assertion, “Let’s not try to pretend that photography is still a medium we can trust” (Dohadwala, 2016). Since photography began as a recording tool used to document reality, it is generally assumed that whatever was captured and presented within the image is an accurate

depiction of truth and reality. Zhao identifies himself as a documentary photographer but claims that he is a very subjective one (Hau, 2016).

Charge. Photography has evolved into a medium of expression for Zhao where he uses methods that includes falsification and the camera's ability in presenting "truth" (Dohadwala, 2016). Zhao mentioned in another interview that "We should always question everything that is given to us" (Hau, 2016). Zhao's aim was to create works that create an open dialogue with his audience about the idea of Nature.

Brief. Robert Zhao admitted that he is highly reliant on text when presenting his photographic works, which he considers a form of baggage. He believes that his fictional tales would fail to be conveyed to his viewers through images alone (Lee, 2013). In Figure 6, the image shows a photograph of a square-shaped apple which is an uncommon shape. Zhao is interested in how our perspectives change about a photograph whenever it is accompanied with a textual description. His texts are used as a form of guidance to direct the viewers towards a certain perspective after they have been manipulated with meaning. He does however find that some visually powerful images were meant to be experienced without the text although he understood that text sometimes can make the image more enjoyable.

The understanding and uncovering of the nature of "truth" is an essential process in Zhao's artistic process of creating highly fictional works. In an interview with Art Radar, he shared the following quote he deemed remarkable, "the honest, if they are to pursue the truth, they must be sufficiently competent at dishonesty" (Dohadwala, 2016). While some of Zhao's methods in creating fictional works included falsification, he emphasised the importance of understanding the construction of truth in his process when creating them. Therefore, it was necessary for him to research the facts about his subjects thoroughly before creating any fictional works in the form of photographs and text aimed at telling the "truth". In Figure 6, *Square apple, Plate 22* by Zhao, one would observe an uncommon appearance of an apple

which is conventionally known to be round-shaped. It draws visual interest from the uncommon aesthetic of a squarish apple against the clean pink background. This is accompanied with a caption as the background context. Although it is essential for his images to have an accompanying text, Zhao has indicated that he has a preference for images which are visually strong on its own.

In creating the series of images for “A Guide to Flora and Fauna of the World”, Zhao took the chance to reorganise his notebook which has a collection of stories about nature since he started photography (Woods, 2015). The stories include places and objects he had come across from a long time ago. In this series of works, he maintained the use of photography to question its credibility and prompt further into the field of science where he documented 55 different animals, plants and environments that have been directly affected by human action in an indirect manner. This apple is one of the products resulting from human intervention, where mutations have been engineered for ornamentation sake. Robert Zhao explained that there was a lot of research which went into the conceptualisation of this series of images. According to Zhao, the narrative of the situation and the images are equally important (Woods, 2015). As stated in the text for *Square apple, Plate 22*:

Sold in a department store in South Korea, these square apples were created as gifts for students taking the College Scholastic Ability Test, with some inscribed with the words ‘pass’ or ‘success’. A similar square watermelon was developed in Japan in the 1980s. The cubic fruits are created by stunting their growth in glass cubes (Zoologists, 2013).

Since Zhao placed a strong emphasis on the importance of research, he investigated the different fields of South Korean culture which included consumerism, education and food culture to conceive a text narration for the odd-shaped apple (Dohadwala, 2016). The lengthy writing supported by well-researched material serves as an important basis for the narration of a fictional story to complement the image. According to Risatti and Trapp (2007), we must

understand the intentionality of the image in order for the image to be recognised as a work of art. A viewer would be amused at first encounter with Figure 6 and remained curious towards the artist's intention implied within the image. It might prompt them to raise questions such as: Are we looking at an apple? Where did this square apple comes from? What is the photographer trying to convey in this image? This apple remains as an odd-shaped apple if we do not understand the photographer's intention. The image and significance of the odd-shaped apple may not be completed without the accompanying text of fictional tale to encourage the viewers to look more closely at the image. Thus, the researched materials conceived in the form of the image and text play a critical role in establishing the bridge between the artist, the work and the viewer.

Many of his works shows his subject juxtaposed against a clean background such as in the case of the *Square Apple, Plate 22*, an odd-shaped apple photographed against a pink background. Zhao avoids having any kind of emotional response from being foregrounding his work because he finds that emotions impedes the conversation rather than grooms it (Lee, 2013). He seemed to have found a way to relieve the work of emotions and present it from a more objective perspective by placing the subject of study against a clean background. The clean spacious background also allows the viewers to focus on the formal qualities of the subject and the empty space allows the viewers to have room for contemplation between the subject and the written text.

Food exists as an object of interest and aesthetics for Zhao to complement his text and vice versa to craft a fictional tale which ultimately draws the viewers to critically examine and raise questions towards their surroundings and his works. Zhao's approach to photography reminded me of the formal deceptive properties of the camera medium when creating works that uses food to draw the viewers' curiosity and encourages them to question and look deeper into the image. He has also greatly influenced the way I perceive space around food in

photographs and the possibility of including an accompanying text to complement the images as part of the work.

The critical analysis on these artists' works has provided insights to understanding their intentions and creative solutions to produce photographs of food that can be considered as a form of representational art. Whether it is applying Martin Parr's snapshot aesthetics, Robert Zhao's use of accompanying text to his fictional images or conducting still life studies using found objects from a neighbourhood market like Lorenzo Vitturi, they have demonstrated how the photographer can break away from the imprisonment of the "causal relationship" as argued by Scruton to be a challenge when creating a fine art photograph using food as materials. The inquiry on the artists' brief also indicates many successful creative solutions in portraying food with different notions of representation. These examples represent the different sets of technical solutions tailored by the artists themselves to overcome specific problems they faced when expressing their intentions in their photographs of food. The photo experiments conducted in the next section draw upon some of these technical solutions as part of my imaginative inquiry, to gain a deeper understanding towards one of my other research questions: What are the different ways in which food can be used as an artistic material to convey a sense of culture?

The Imaginative Inquiry

The imaginative inquiry is an important element of study which refers to the stage of creating works in a “studio” environment as a site with research potential which can contribute significant knowledge and understanding (Sullivan, 2010). Artistic research can be viewed as an open-ended, historical, context-aware and narrative enterprise (Hannula et al., 2014). This section borrows the notion of the artistic process from the formula of artistic research devised by Mika Hannula, Tere Vaden and Juha Suoranta to theorise and elaborate on the importance of having a research diary (Hannula et al., 2014). The authors have summed up the basic formula of producing artistic research into the following equation: “artistic research = artistic process (acts inside the practice) + arguing for a point of view (contextual, interpretive, conceptual, narrative work)” (Hannula et al., 2014, p. 15). The artistic process in the context of artistic research methodology refers to the work performed within the practice in the context of artistic research (Hannula et al., 2014). Additionally, they argue that the “forms and ways of doing artistic research are genuinely open and should stay that way” (Hannula et al., 2014, p. 15) which emphasises the importance of being open-minded and flexible in the process of research. This research process may lead to questions about the conditions of the artist’s practice yet providing the freedom to expand beyond its boundaries.

Visual arts research places heavy emphasis on the practice itself—this is the phase for the imaginative inquiry where I draw upon and attempt to apply the consolidated information from the theoretical inquiries into art, food and photography. The imaginative inquiry begins with developing experimental photos that test different ways of photographing food as a material and subject. According to Hannula, Vaden and Suoranta (2014), the researcher’s role is to work like an insider—as a participant within the practice—and as an outsider—one who contemplates the process of artistic creation from a distance. The imaginative inquiry clearly demands for the roles of the researcher to be in a reflexive state as it is critical for the artist-

researcher to be engaged in the artistic process by moving in and out between phases of engagements as an insider and from a reflective distance as an outsider. This engagement activity can also be read along the lines of the reflexive practice as proposed by Sullivan (2010). Photo experiments are conducted in a highly self-reflexive environment where the intellectual inquiry (theoretical research) is used to inform the imaginative inquiry (the experimental photos), and the experimental works reflects back onto the intellectual research.

The Research Diary: A Historical Background

Among many artists who came before, Leonardo da Vinci had a well-known research diary in the form of a sketchbook that served as a creative space to generate and record his ideas (Lewin & Somekh, 2005). Similarly in the academic environment, Hannula, Vaden and Suoranta (2014) suggested that the artistic process can be recorded in the form of a research diary. This process may consist of performances, artworks, records of day-to-day occurrences, sketches, and proposals. All of these activities eventually produce materials of the practical component such as paintings, videos, objects, texts and photographs. I utilise the research diary to document my artistic process, and it serves as a record of the problems I faced when creating works as well as the processes of forming solutions to overcome these challenges. This process can be theorized using the Sullivan's framework of "Create-critique" as the artistic process is seen equivalent to the stage of art-making where I visualised possible ideas in response to pertinent issues in relation to the use of expired food as materials, and the exploration of the relationship between art, food and photography (Sullivan, 2010). It is important to maintain a highly self-reflexive practice approach in my "studio" environment where works created are analysed, critiqued and be evaluated by myself and my peers.

Establishing the Bridge of Communication

It can be critically important for the individual (viewer) and the maker (myself) to be informed of my decisions when visualising certain ideas and imposing meanings into the work if one

wants to assume of my food photographs as a work of art. In *A Theory of Craft: Function and Aesthetic Expression*, Risatti and Trapp (2007) argued that we must realise the intentionality of the maker in their craft. It is only through this recognition from the viewers, which transforms the image as in fine art and fine craft, where the question of “What am I making?” is directed to the maker, and “what am I beholding?” to the beholder (the image). This can be perceived in a practical sense in terms of the art and craft in its creation as well as a philosophical question because it is a manifestation of the relationship between the maker’s thought (as a transformative act) and the image conceived from that thought, to be presented for the viewer to behold (Risatti & Trapp, 2007). Therefore, it is vital for us to consider that art requires the viewer to be conscious of the intention of the artist to various extent for themselves (the viewers) to be able to comprehend and appreciate fine art. This agreement also highlights the importance in creating a photograph which can “communicate” my artistic intentions to the viewer as the viewers are expected to be able to comprehend these images in order for the work to be considered art. Thus, the research diary plays an important role in recording the process of creation and document these instances where I attempt to negotiate the role between myself as the artist, artwork and the viewer.

Three Phases of Artist Interventions

The artistic process consists of experimental fine art photographs and engages directly with my research concerns in using food as a form of artistic material and as subject matter in photographs. The various challenges I have faced in the artistic process of developing experimental photos that portray food and photography as a work of art have emerged from some form of artist intervention at different stages of the photography process. Thereby, I proposed these three different phases of photography which allow greater flexibility for methods of manipulations or interventions to occur in different forms: the pre-production phase, the photography phase and the post-production phase. The pre-production phase refers

to the initial preparatory stage of photography which depends highly on the preconceptions of the photographer as a form of guidance to prepare the necessary groundwork before the photograph is taken. The photography phase is the main event where the photographer is able to apply their subjective perspective or intentions during the process of photographing the subject. The interventions can come in different forms such as through the choice of objects to be photographed, the use of various lighting conditions or the compositional skills in framing the subject. The photographic process does not end immediately after the photograph has been taken. Photographers can continue to work on the photographs and intervene using different types of digital and manual manipulation during the post-production phase. Some of the common digital manipulations include using of Photoshop to perform retouching on the image or creating montages. Manual manipulations of the image may consist of writing or craftwork imposed on the image itself. In the case when the photographer has excessively abstracted the object or concealed his/her artistic intentions during the pre-production or the photo shoot phase, it is possible to compensate and establish the communication bridge by using accompanying text to guide the viewers in reading the image in the post-production phase. There is however no fixed formula to applying artist interventions to the different phases of photography. The intervention should only be applied at stages deemed fit by the fine art photographer or when it is suitable to fulfil his/her purpose of the inquiry.

Expired Food as a Form of Material and as Subject Matter

As I progressed into the development of this research project, the scope grew to include conducting photo experiments with various photograph approaches, refinements and narrowed down to focusing on expired food as a form of materials and subject matter. The artistic process in my photo experiments eventually rendered food inedible. My views towards food was a result of my family upbringing where food wastage was discouraged. Inevitably, my upbringing had resulted in uncontrollable guilt when I involved edible food as part of my

practice as the artistic process I embarked on would often eventually render them inedible. As a result, my research process took a detour, as I started to explore the alternative of using expired food. The transition from my choice of using non-expired, edible food to expired food has resulted in my research focus expanding from engaging food as a form of material to food as a subject matter as well. The “expired condition of food” has given me potential space to pursue this artistic inquiry on two different grounds in photographs: the materiality of expired food and the culture of food wastage in Singapore.

This literary investigation of the expired food phenomenon from both global and local perspectives serves as contextual materials for using expired food in creating an artwork. The scope of investigation now covers food as a subject matter by analysing it in the context of our confused perception towards expired food. The study begins with an overall awareness of the global perspective and condition of the food wastage situation and its consequences, which then narrows down to the study of food wastage situation and its causes in Singapore as my interest in expired food was born from a local observation.

The Photography Process

As this project is heavily dependent on practice-based research, the details of my photography process is elaborated in various experiments recorded in the later part of this thesis. The general outline of this photography process consist of first identifying a problem or concerns (my research question in this case), and then it proceeds to outline my experiements with food as a material in photographs. These photo experiment often begin from a focus on specific subject or object, followed by various tests such as the use of variable lighting conditions, depth of field, colours, compositions or different photo equipments. These experiments will then conclude with a final photo-editing process. These trials will repeat until the outcome of the image fulfills my artistic vision and successfully conveys my intentions onto the photograph.

My Research Diary: Documenting Photo Experiments

The following sections illustrate the research diary which I used to document my artistic process in undertaking 10 photo experiments, as well as the internal discussions that emerged in the process of using food as a form of artistic material and a subject matter in photographs. The outcome of these experiments has been conceived in the form of the respective photographs titled “Photo Experiments” because this title assumes the attitude of a scientific experiment in an artistic process which should constantly aim to inquire and then acquire new methods of food photography and artistic knowledge. In these photo experiments, I seek to explore the following two questions: first, what are the approaches that photographers have undertaken in order to use food as a material; and second, in what ways can food be used as an artistic material to convey a sense of culture?

Experiments 1-10 consist of experiments which reference the various approaches undertaken by the five selected photographers as detailed in the earlier section titled “The Intellectual Inquiry”. The insights gained from these 10 photo experiments have been grouped according to the different purposes of the inquiry such as experimenting with the use of food as an artistic material or a particular photography approach. In the discussions, I addressed these intended purposes of inquiry with the observations made on the outcome of the experiments to form a response towards the research question of how food photography can be considered as a work of art.

Experiment 1 & 2: Photographing A Banana to Understand its Stereotypical Associations with Sexual Innuendos and Racial Connotations

Bananas have been commonly associated with sexual innuendos as well as certain racial connotations (O'Shaughnessy, 2016). The shape of the banana was previously associated with sexual innuendos because the form of the banana is likened to the male sexual organ. The colour difference between the banana skin and the inner fair-coloured flesh has also been

associated with stereotypical racial references to that of an Asian-American that appeared as the yellow-skinned Asian on the outside with a white American soul inside (Hall, 2017). Since the banana is a popular food item that can be easily associated with other meanings, I chose to experiment with using bananas as a material to perform four different inquiries in relation to understanding the connection between food and culture. First, I observed and attempted to identify the association of the banana as a sexually suggestive object and its racial references by photographing it and visually studying it. Secondly, I explored Robert Zhao's photographic approach, in using visual methods of falsification by spraying the pale skin of a banana with black spray paint to invite the viewer to question its authenticity and using a clean pink background as part of the experiment to understand the purpose of a clean and spacious background to create room for the viewer to speculate. Thirdly, I questioned the applicability and limitations of Edward Weston's photographic approach in using natural sunlight as the main light source when photographing the object. Lastly, I incorporated Jan Groover's postmodern attitude in her photographic approach by photographing the black banana in a "meaningless" and "illogical" space.

Figure 7. Jasper Yu (2018). Experiment 1.

In Experiment 1 (See Figure 7), it was observed that there exists a visual similarity between the shape of the black banana and a male sexual organ which explained its suggestive reputation. According to studies, photographs of food can also become a work of art as long as the photograph portrays the artist's intentions and does not present the subject as a mirror reflection of the object in reality (Risatti & Trapp, 2007; Scruton, 2013). This image of the black banana was an attempt to portray it with a different aesthetic and perspective to develop a better understanding on this requirement for photographs of food to become a work of art. In the case of the black banana, the original colour of the pale-yellow flesh was sprayed black to prevent it from being photographed as merely just a banana. This method can be considered as an effort of artistic intervention to change the aesthetics of the banana in terms of its colour. It also resulted in a shift away from my initial perspective of viewing the banana as a racial connotation referring to an Asian-American person to looking at it as being associated with other darker-skinned persons with an Asian appearance on the outside (the yellow skin reference). In this case, the black coating does not only serve as a form of artistic intervention to change the aesthetics of the banana but also served to signify my artist intention to use the black banana as a material to associate it with other potential racial references.

If we are not looking at the black banana in Experiment 1 as an edible fruit (its natural purpose), then it means I have successfully achieved my intention by presenting the black banana in the photograph as a work of art. I have also made a few observations after experimenting with Zhao's method of falsification which was used in his photography approach. Firstly, the black banana can be portrayed in a more convincing manner if explained with an accompanying text that report facts from detailed contextual information such as a news article from the Times of India, which reported that the banana can turn black naturally after it has been kept in the fridge over a prolonged period of time (Saraswat, 2003). This approach requires the photographer to perform research at the pre-production phase to gather

factual information that can be used in the accompanying text as part of the artwork. Secondly, it is necessary to retain some form of reality such as keeping its original yellow skin to preserve its original associations with reality so that the black banana could be perceived as a genuine outcome from a natural occurrence. This requires the photographer to exercise caution when preparing and using the black banana as a subject in the photograph. The pink background was purely an aesthetic choice to juxtapose the yellow banana with black flesh against something bright and cheery. In this manner, the contrast in tone and colour has effectively helped to provide a better focus and call attention to the main object. The empty space around the object serves as effective and purposeful breathing space to allow the viewers to have room for contemplation on the possible interpretations which could emerge from studying the image.

Figure 8. Jasper Yu (2018). Experiment 2.

Regarding the use of lighting, I was initially inspired by Edward Weston with his use of natural sunlight as the main light source in his works to emphasise the formal qualities of his iconic pepper images. Sunlight can be difficult to manipulate, as the quality of light fluctuates according to the time of day and varying weather conditions. As Singapore is a

country located near the equator, the window for morning light is relatively short compared to other parts of the world. I favour the morning or evening light for their ability to easily exposes the textures of most objects in a warm and nostalgia manner, as seen in Experiment 2 (See Figure 7). When using the softer quality of sunlight in Experiment 1, I hoped to soften the texture of this seemingly crude object and invite viewers to have a closer look at the contents. It is important to note that the photographer is required to make proper judgements about lighting and select a suitable venue to execute the photograph with the ideal soft quality of sunlight. Even after confirming the venue, the quality of sunlight can be technically manipulated and enhanced by using lighting accessories such as whiteboards and blackboards to filter and bounce light to achieve a more cohesive control over the existing lighting conditions of the subject.

In Experiment 2, the hard sunlight seemed to emphasise the textures of the banana flesh better. By monitoring the manner in which the evening light falls through into the kitchen space, I am able to create a “frame” that acts as a vignette to bring the viewer’s attention to the main subject (the black banana). The warm tone from the evening sun does portray a strange sense of nostalgia. The choice of the background environment was inspired by Jan Groover’s use of her kitchen space as the working environment to conduct her artistic experiments with food and kitchen utensils. During the post-modernist period, most of Groover’s actions and decisions were motivated as a form of rebellion against the notion of the common and the logical. This black banana in Experiment 2, was photographed with 2 main purposes: first, I sought to explore and observe the differences in the photographs taken under different natural lighting conditions; and second, to adopt and experience Groover’s rebellious attitude by photographing the black banana against a different background that served no contextual purpose. My motivation to draw upon the rebellious spirit of Groover is a response to my desire to break away from existing societal trends or expectations for art to convey meaning. This

relates to my 7 years of personal experience as an editorial and commercial food photographer, where I am often expected to create numerous photographs of food with an agenda or commercial message in order to make them seem marketable to a wider public. Therefore, this experiment provided the opportunity for me as an artist to engage fully in the technical and conceptual ability of photography and the photographed subject, and to represent the subject in an entirely different light that is devoid of meaning or logic.

Experiment 3 & 4: Photographing Oats and Indonesian Fried Rice in Response to the “Instagram Phenomenon”

The purpose of the inquiry in the image Experiments 3 and 4 (See Figure 9 & 10) is to experiment with different methods of intervention to create an abstract vision of food so that it can become a photographic work of art and convey my artistic response to the “Instagram phenomenon”. Studies have shown that our ideal of the perfect breakfast has changed due to the images seen on the Instagram platform (Bright, 2017; Herman, 2017; Jacobs, 2017; Smithers, 2016). These photographs can be characterised broadly as being highly stylised, exotic and appealing to the senses. This is often achieved through various technical means such as using a flat-lay perspective, the use of natural light or the experimentation with shadows. For the nation to forego the most culturally common breakfast and pursue something that is more aesthetic clearly shows that the mass population value the use of food as a portrayal of their alter ego on social media platforms more than traditions or nutrients that comes with the food consumed (Bright, 2017). As an end user of Instagram, my breakfast choices have also been influenced over time. Instead of consuming kaya bread or instant noodles that I used to grow up with, I am now more inclined to have oats and chia seeds in the morning.

As compared to those aesthetically pleasing and glamorised breakfast photos curated on the Instagram, I attempted to experiment with oats which is known to be a popular choice of breakfast food. In a curated setting, the oats will be carefully arranged on a plate and could

also be accompanied with various props that enhance its overall image. In my experimentation process, I wanted to break away from the norms of photographing breakfast in such a manner. In Experiment 3, the lighting conditions play a role in softening and flattening the textures of the oats in the glass bowl, allowing the contents to be photographed on a two-dimensional plane. When an object is portrayed as a three-dimensional object in a photograph, it often compels the viewer to view it in a realistic manner as compared to the same object photographed from a two-dimensional perspective. As a result, I wanted to execute this photograph with a two-dimensional quality to emphasise the oats without the distracting edges of the glass bowl it was placed in. In this way, the oats seemed to have been successfully portrayed in an abstract manner, transforming the photograph into a work of art. My artistic response to the phenomenon seems to have successfully been conceived in this abstracted image of the ideal breakfast which was derived from my intention to go against the common aesthetic of Instagram food photographs (Herman, 2017).

Figure 9. Jasper Yu (2018). Experiment 3.

Similarly, the image in Experiment 4 (See Figure 10), attempts to represent food in an abstracted state to portray it as artistic material in an image and also to represent my artistic response to the Instagram phenomenon (Herman, 2017; Smithers, 2016), which resulted in the habit of having to photograph one's meals before actually eating them. Our behavioural change

was subconsciously affected by the thousands of food images we have seen on the Instagram platform (Bright, 2017). Its influence on us is evident as we begin to perform similar habits before we begin our meal in the same way as many others. This method of artist intervention happened at the post-production phase where I use multiple photo montages to express my artistic response to the repetitive acts and countless efforts of Instagram users who document photographs of their meals before eating. Food in this image also serve as a form of contextual material with the purpose of visually informing the viewers that it depicts a scene at mealtime. Experiment 4 was successful in conveying my artistic response towards the photographic trend through the process of creating a digital montage from manipulating photographs of the same dish in the post-production process to portray food as a work of art.

Figure 10. Jasper Yu (2018). Experiment 4.

Experiment 5: Photographing a Strawberry in an Uncommon Method to Comment on Reported News

It has been reported in a news article that strawberries with needles piercing into their flesh have been found in a Singapore supermarket (Lee, 2018). The image in Experiment 5 (See Figure 11) used food photography to create a fiction out of that fact and to raise awareness

of the issue of food safety. How can the result be visually interesting and invite viewers to be more aware of food safety and raise questions on the authenticity of the image and the event? I have experimented with Robert Zhao's photographic approach in creating an image using a combination of fiction and facts that revolved around this article. This approach has resulted in me creating a fictional image of the strawberries in the unusual state of having needles poked in it. It turned out visually interesting as it is not a common sight to see a strawberry under such conditions. Without the use of an accompanying text, the intention of the photographer could remain inaccessible to the viewers, leaving the viewers perplexed. As the background retained a consistency in its pink tone, the flat lighting helped to portray a clean and evenly lighted image for the viewers to further focus and contemplate the usual phenomenon of a strawberry with needles poked in it. The photography approach displayed in this experiment is an attempt to create an interesting visual that draws the viewer to question further on the artist intention when viewing a needle-filled strawberry against a clean background.

Figure 11. Jasper Yu (2018). Experiment 5.

Experiment 6 & 7: Photographing Oranges as a Chinese Cultural Object

Oranges are often used in Chinese religious events (Singapore Tourism Board, 2019) as offerings and are exchanged during Chinese New Year to insure good fortune (Goh, n.d.). Using Martin's Parr photography approach, I chose to document the oranges as a representation

of Chinese culture in Singapore. In Experiments 6 and 7 (See Figure 12 & 13), I have pursued this inquiry by photographing the oranges in an environment that served as a contextualizing background and used snapshot aesthetics as a deceptive device. As observed in the image in Experiment 6, the use of direct flash, the slightly tilted camera angle and the oversaturation of colours successfully highlights the oranges as my subject of focus and suggests that the photograph was taken in a spontaneous moment. The image in Experiment 6 has successfully expressed these techniques as part of the snapshot aesthetics employed by Martin Parr in his work which I have discussed previously.

Figure 12. Jasper Yu (2018). Experiment 6.

This approach utilizes the snapshot aesthetic as a method and requires the images to be viewed collectively in a series for the viewer to realize their meaning. I created Experiment 7 (See Figure 13) as a follow up image to Experiment 6 (See Figure 12), by changing the environment and context of which the oranges were situated in. The choice of background or the environment of the subject does play an important role in providing context to the food presented in the photograph. The oranges were not obviously abstracted in the aesthetic sense, but the snapshot aesthetics helped to convey a strong impression of the artist intervention to

imply my focus on using the orange as a food element in the photograph to represent Singapore Chinese culture. The additional image of Experiment 7 to the previous image, Experiment 6, does not exactly contribute to how it can be perceived as a series of images. It does, however, reveal some form of conscious decisions as part of the deceptive tool when one observes and analyses the continuity between these two images. In some sense, the continuity and consistency in using the snapshot aesthetic on the two images can be validated as a successful mean of artist intervention in the image to portray the food in the photograph as a material to represent Singapore Chinese culture.

Figure 13. Jasper Yu (2018). Experiment 7.

Experiment 8: Photographing Yakult in an Abstract Manner

Yakult is a fermented drink that contains probiotics and is often consumed after meals as it is presumably good for the digestive system. In this image (See Figure 14), I experimented with the use of gold spray paint to portray Yakult from a different perspective. By playing on the pun which refers to Yakult as a “cultured” drink, anyone who consumed this drink should be able to gain refined taste, good manners, and became “cultured”. As part of my

experimentation with gold spray paint, I compared the difference between 18k and 22k gold spray paint, the latter proving to be able to provide a richer gold effect. I had coated a bottle of Yakult with a layer of gold spray paint with the intention of representing it as a work of art and portraying its significance as a precious drink that can bless “cultured” qualities on to anyone who consumes it. The initial image of Golden Yakult does not seem to have answered my initial inquiry to have it being represented as a work of art. This could be due to a lack of depth of focus in the image, which eventually called forth a second layer of artist intervention in the form of digital manipulations to create montages of mini Yakult images onto the main Yakult image. The digital montage of the repetitive small images of Yakult resulted into a layer of filter in the image to successfully conceal the original aesthetics of the Yakult to portray it as a work of art and also successfully form an association with my artist intention, which was to express it as a mass produced cultural product.

Figure 14. Jasper Yu (2018). Experiment 8.

Experiment 9 & 10: Photographing Comfort Food, Sup Tulang Merah & Curry Batang Fish, in an Abstract Manner

Comfort food can be seen as a form of nourishment for the human body and soul ("Comfort food," 2011). They are foods commonly associated with specific scenarios or occasions, where they trigger a sense of nostalgia or remembered happiness from the past when consumed (Allen, 2019). According to Allen (2019), comfort food refers to a specific food item that is highly personalised and can be recognised for the comforting feeling it brings to an individual. As part of this experiment, I draw upon the personal experiences of Auntie Noor and Uncle Raja, whose comfort foods are Sup Tulang Merah and Curry Batang Fish respectively.

Auntie Noor's family's comfort food is the Sup Tulang Merah dish. It is a popular Muslim-Indian mutton curry dish that becomes more savoury from the use of the lamb's bone marrow with the curry. Auntie Noor recounted that her four kids would rush to the kitchen immediately if they smelled her cooking their favourite comfort food and would finish half a pot of it before lunch was officially ready. The purpose of my inquiry in the image, Experiment 9 (See Figure 15), was to abstract Sup Tulang Merah as an artistic source material to represent the notion of comfort which is unique to Auntie Noor's family. For that purpose, I experimented using different methods of intervention such as the gold spray paint to change the original colour of the bone, selectively photographing only one ingredient (the bone) from the dish, using straws as a prop to form an association to its cultural connotations with the original dish, and photographing it in an environment that does not hint at its original purpose as part of the dining experience. For people who have never encountered the Sup Tulang Merah dish, they might not see the association between this image and that dish. For everyone else who were not aware that Auntie Noor's family's comfort food is the Sup Tulang Merah dish (which inspired the creation of this experimental photograph), they might never perceive it as a form of comfort food. Comfort food is a highly personalised form of food, similar to how this experimental photo has attempted to represent a comfort food in a different aesthetic that

is only accessible to the owner of the image. The golden finish does not make much sense here on the conceptual level, but it does change the colour of the bone, which can be perceived as some form of artist intervention on the aesthetic surface. As Sup Tulang Merah can be savoured in different ways, the use of the straw is one of the common methods to access the marrow that's hidden deep in the hollow bone, which was represented in this image. This red straw was meant to be perceived as a cultural connotation that can explain this golden bone as part of the eating culture for this Malay-Indian dish. There is the irony of wanting the viewers to recognise this object as artistic material that can be associated to the Malay-Indian dish but being hardly recognisable as a form of comfort food. By photographing the selected contents in an environment that does not hint at the dining experience, this image can hardly be perceived as relatable the original dish Sup Tulang Merah. I conclude this experiment as a success with the various means of artistic interventions to portray it as a work of art, while the effort of associating it with the cultural connotations to the original dish of Sup Tulang Merah is highly evident with the use of the red straw.

Figure 15. Jasper Yu (2018). Experiment 9.

Experiment 10 (See Figure 16) depicts food as an artistic material inspired by the comfort food from Uncle Raja's family. His comfort food is Curry Batang Fish, a dish cooked by his wife (Auntie Saras), which eventually became the family's choice of comfort food. In the image Experiment 10, I used the Curry Batang Fish as an artistic material by employing the golden spray to change its original colour to repurpose it as a work of abstracted art to experiment with Edward Weston's photographic approach of presenting food with the maximum amount of details. By experimenting with digital manipulation at the post-production phase, I used digital methods in Photoshop to stack different points of focus of the fish. In this manner, I was able to digitally increase the depth of field similarly to how Edward Weston had designed his ultra-small aperture with the f/240 lens to capture the maximum details of the subject. Although this sort of digital manipulations was able to achieve a significant amount of depth by stacking layers of focus, there seemed to be something synthetic that is visible when viewing the image from close up. It could be the unusual sharpness depicted in this image that gives off this synthetic or digitized feeling. As my initial purpose was to portray the intimacy of this dish with Uncle Raja's family, this initial disconnection was compensated for with the use of curry powder as a mean to associate this artistic representation of the Curry Batang Fish with an impression of the original Curry Batang Fish.

Figure 16. Jasper Yu (2018). Experiment 10.

Old is Gold: Food Photographs as Culture

Previously, I explored the materiality of food in photographs through using various visual approaches and strategies that are based on the critical analysis of theoretical texts. In this section, my artistic inquiry progressed towards an extended attempt to photograph food, not just as a material, but also to convey a sense of culture within the context of food as my subject matter.

Food as Culture

Food and culture are closely related to one another. This intimate relationship can be observed in our everyday lives as we make various food choices in our meals. These decisions reflect the cultural influence that we gained from food itself. According to Dwyer and Freitas (2013), the key cultural factors influencing our food choices may consist of geography, environment, biology, physiology, the senses, technology, politics, and economics, among others. Since food and culture is in such an established relationship, how can we pursue food in its materiality sense and convey this relationship in photographs as well? Is food in itself the epitome of culture? What role will a photographer play when attempting to convey a sense of culture through food?

Food as subject matter can reflect culture in a photograph through the photographer's interpretation of the cultural background of the specified food item and his/ her photography skills. A piece of bread remains a piece of bread until the photographer participates in the scene and captures it as an image through his/her photographic skills. The photographed bread can now represent different meanings because of the intervention of the photographer or the photographic approach. Martin Parr photographed food as a form of material with his snapshot aesthetics while actually intended for them to serve as an artistic means in representing various national identity as his subject matter of interest. His method of photography, the background setting, the choice of food, composition, lighting and the choice of colours reflect his

understanding and interpretation of the nation's culture. His food photographs were not used to merely illustrate the physical properties of food but to portray them as representations of national identity.

Transition from Edible Food to Expired Food

The previous photo experiments involved the manipulation of edible food as an artistic material which eventually rendered them inedible. This destructive approach impeded the progress of my research as my traditional family upbringing discouraged me from wasting edible food. As a result, my research led me to discovering the alternative of using expired food. The expired condition of food has given me potential space to pursue this artistic inquiry on two different levels: the materiality of the expired food and Singapore food waste culture.

As this research deals mainly with food as a material in photographs and questions the possible ways in using food as a subject matter to express culture, it is necessary for me to elaborate on the methods behind working with gold, expired bread in the series "Old is Gold". My fascination with the materiality of expired food can be observed from the progress of my photo experiments from *Old is Gold #1* (Refer to Figure 21) to *Old is Gold #4* (Refer to Figure 24). Food is often believed to have lost its nutritional value when it is deemed expired and has to be disposed. Nonetheless, expired food could still be consumed if we are able to make better judgements to assess whether it is still edible or not beyond its stated expiration date. In view of this, the materiality of food itself is organic, and is capable of sustaining and accommodating other forms of life under appropriate conditions. In this final series I photographed bread sprayed with gold paint. The golden bread was eventually nurtured over time in darkness to breathe new life into it as part of my inquiry into pushing the boundaries of the materiality of food.

As my imaginative inquiry progressed from Experiments 8, 9 and 10, it can be observed that there is a consistent use of gold spray paint on my food items. There are several motivations behind the application of gold spray paint as a form of artistic expression. Firstly, the gold spray paint provides a different layer to alter the original color of the bread, portraying it differently in a monochromatic state between the duality of black and gold. Secondly, gold in Chinese culture symbolises wealth and lavishness. This symbolism was imposed onto the expired bread by coating it in gold to portray it as having richness and a greater value. Thirdly, the act of covering the expired bread in gold spray paint is similar to the idea of gold-leaf gilding on figures of Buddha. In Buddhist culture, the act of gilding Buddha figures with gold-leaf is deemed as an act to honour Buddha's teachings. My family engages in this practice when celebrating important religious occasions. Studies have revealed that the confusion surrounding expiry date labels has clouded consumers' judgement and often caused them to dispose of "expired" food even though they may still be edible (Collart & Interis, 2018; Congress, 2016; Denneman, 2015). In "Old is Gold", the act of enveloping the expired bread in gold is equivalent to a celebratory act in emphasising the possibility for us in adopting a renewed perception towards expired food.

The other component in the golden bread that conveys some form of cultural information lies in my deliberate choice in using expired bread. Studies have revealed that many Singaporeans do not perceive expired food as food fit for consumption and this misconception contributes to one of the biggest sources of food wastage in Singapore (National Environment Agency, 2015; Denneman, 2015; Low, 2010). The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations reported that food wastage in high income areas is more likely to happen in the final stages, specifically in the consumption stage (FAO, 2013). This is especially evident in Singapore where there is an abundance of food produced. When consuming food, the priority of the consumer has shifted from it being merely a source of

sustenance to the focus on more demanding aspects such as the aesthetics and freshness of food. The National Environment Agency (NEA) (2015) surveyed that Singaporeans were generally unwilling to compromise on freshness and defects on food. The top three types of food commonly being thrown away were food that have expired, grown mouldy or deemed bad based on the aesthetics, smell and taste. The biggest motivation for Singaporeans to reduce food wastage is money-related incentives, while being concerned for the environment ranks second. The survey reveals the confusion that surrounds expired food and this provided the impetus to use expired food to bring greater awareness of the reasons that result in food wastage in Singapore.

The focus in this series of works lies in the exploration of the materiality of food in photographs and how food can be used to convey a sense of culture. Following this perspective, the resulting photographs can hint at the cultural conditions that revolve around the entirety of the expired food waste environment of Singapore and the cultural background of the photographer. Prior to the previous 10 experiments which had contributed significantly to answering my research questions, the following 5 experiments were focused on achieving a photograph that can satisfy and represent my artistic inquiry into using expired food as a material and subject matter to represent what I wanted to convey in relation to contemporary Singaporean attitudes towards food and wastage.

Old is Gold #1

In this image of *Old is Gold #1* (See Figure 17), I experimented with expired Kaya bread as an artistic material to address the expired food waste situation as subject matter. For this purpose, I needed to seek a solution to the two questions at hand. Firstly, I wanted to rework the common image of expired food as garbage to that of an object of value and importance—what can I do to the expired kaya bread to achieve this? Secondly, how can I portray expired kaya bread as a work of art?

Figure 17. Jasper Yu (2019). Old is Gold #1

To address the first question, I spray-coated the expired kaya bread with gold paint to portray it as an object of luxury and significance. For the same purpose, I have also chosen to use strobe lights to significantly enhance the textures of the golden bread and give it a luxurious look. By revealing only a fraction of the bread, this abstracted perspective makes it hard for anyone to recognize it as kaya bread. Therefore, as part of my solution to address the second question, I did a closeup shot of the golden bread to abstract it and to portray it as an artistic material. The closeup photograph of a selected area of the bread also implies meanings when observed closely. One can identify a significant dent on the left side of the bread in the image is the result of a handling injury, which probably led to it being left to expire. Both solutions seemed to have abstracted the kaya bread from an aesthetic point of view and successfully portray it as a work of art. The close-up shot also successfully implied and conveyed the cultural connotations of this kaya bread as an expired food and implicating the cosmetic injuries as one of the causes of expired food wastage. The gold treatment to the bread also suggested my artistic intention to convey the importance of expired food, which might still be edible, and should be cherished in the same way gold is.

Old is Gold #2

This image aims to inquire into the possibility of showing bread in its entirety and question if the full presentation of golden kaya bread in the photograph will still be considered as a work of art. Does showing the full form of the photographed bread reveal more about its contextual background? In response to these questions, by revealing the full form of the expired kaya bread embellished with gold spray paint and the use of strobe lights to enhance the texture of the bread, it was observed that the bread continued to be seen as an abstract form. The strong highlights on the bread appeared to be more obvious as compared to the previous experimental photo, which could be due to editing on the of initial exposure to utilise the highlights of the bread to accentuate its shape and texture. *Old is Gold #2* (See Figure 18) seems to present a more interesting visual when compared to *Old is Gold #1* (See Figure 17). This observation can be explained because of the empty space around the golden kaya bread and the flat black tone background. Both of these visual strategies were referenced from Experiment 5 as useful solutions to assist viewers to focus better on the subject as well as giving viewers room for contemplation by allowing enough space around the subject.

Figure 18. Jasper Yu (2019). *Old is Gold #2*.

Old is Gold #3

Similar to the problem I faced previously in Experiment 8 (See Figure 14), I sensed a lack of depth in the image *Old is Gold #2* (See Figure 18), even though it had successfully transformed the bread into a work of art in an abstract sense and also implied my artistic intentions with the use of the gold spray paint. Based on the idea that expired kaya bread once embellished in gold paint can represent similar notions of importance, value and invulnerability as gold, this suggests that the expired golden kaya bread has metaphorically inherited similar golden properties that prevents it from decomposing. The introduction of the “fungus” elements in the metaphorical form of mosaics, refers to newly introduced concepts of vulnerability and weakness. The mosaics were meant to be perceived as fungus that has successfully invaded the golden bread, portraying it as vulnerable. What I’m trying to portray here is the fact that even gold cannot withstand the test of time despite it having attributes that prevents it from decomposing over an extended period of time. In *Old is Gold #3* (See Figure 19), these mosaics, which have been achieved using a digital montage comprised of different

tones of gold, can also be perceived as a form of artistic intervention to conceal the “ugly” portion of the bread. This concept can be seen as the artist’s effort to portray the expired food with a renewed significance and value while memorialising its transient nature through the use of photography. The bottom line which I wish to communicate is that nothing on earth can withstand the test of time, neither gold nor expired food.

Figure 19. Jasper Yu (2019). *Old is Gold #3*.

Old is Gold #4

In the image *Old is Gold #4* (See Figure 20), I experimented with a different background to see if it would result in any significant aesthetic or contextual differences. Would a change in the background help to better convey my artistic intention more effectively, while encapsulating the vulnerability of time as well as maintaining some form of association to the central issue of the expired food phenomenon? I experimented with including a plastic bag and a pink background to give it some texture, which I thought might enhanced the image visually. The outcome revealed otherwise, which shows that the additional use of a coloured

background and plastic bag might have taken away the space for the viewers to contemplate the golden bread in its previous context.

Figure 20. Jasper Yu (2019). *Old is Gold #4*.

Old is Gold #5

At this point of the experiment, several thoughts came to my mind: what are some of the other possible ways to improve from *Old is Gold #3* (See Figure 19)? How can we improve on the quality of the image in terms of showing more details of the subject in an analog way instead of the digital approach I used previously in Experiment 10 (See Figure 16)? The fungus presented in the form of digital mosaics in *Old is Gold #3* seemed a bit too synthetic. Is there a way to present the fungus in a more organic form?

Since this type of image focuses on the formal qualities of the relationship between subject and image, I chose to switch my initial 35mm digital camera to the 4 x 5" Monorail view camera with the medium format digital back and photograph the 4-month-old gold kaya bread using an extremely narrow aperture of f/32 . The camera turned out to produce fantastic image qualities in many aspects especially the tonal qualities and made the image appear less digital or synthetic. Now, I could return to experimenting with the new element introduced on

the golden bread, which was the organic fungus that took 4 months to grow to its current state. After I attempted to introduce the fake fungus / mosaic in photo Experiment 13, I figured that it might be a good idea to let nature intervene in an organic way. This might create more depth to the work rather than purely relying on a synthetic approach (Photoshop). In this case, it seemed like a successful attempt to present the image with more depth and quality using a less predictable approach.

The fungus turned out to be slightly brown (initially white) over a prolonged period of 4 months in a dark and moist environment (I kept the golden bread in a plastic container and stored it in a dark environment to promote the growth of the fungus). From afar, *Old is Gold* #5 (See Figure 21) seemed to portray a golden object that has rusted (which is impossible, gold doesn't rust). This observation aligned with my concept of how even gold could not withstand the test of time and will eventually result in the golden bread being invaded by fungus. From a closer look, one would notice that the "rust" is made of fungus while the identity of the golden object might still remain unknown as its original shape has shrunk over time into an abstract state. The developmental stages of this image illustrate the process of going from the initial use of food as an artistic material to incorporating its function as a subject matter, to the shift from using edible food to the choice of inedible food as my artistic material. Then came the change in the photographic medium from a 35mm digital camera to a 4 x 5" Monorail view camera. Finally, there was evolution from the representation of fungus by digital means to cultivating the organic growth of fungus on the expired food itself. These listed developments have contributed significantly to the final image in terms of concept, material, medium and approach.

Figure 21. Jasper Yu (2019). *Old is Gold #5*.

The choice of using expired food as my material and the application of gold spray paint both served as my artistic tool to imply cultural associations layered within the photograph of the gold expired bread as seen in *Old is Gold #5* (See Figure 21). As explained previously, the gold bread signify cultural influences from my Chinese and religious roots, while the choice of photographing an expired loaf of bread engages with the food wastage phenomenon in Singapore. In terms of my inquiry into the materiality of expired bread, the initial outcome with the initial application of the golden spray and various photographic techniques when photographing the bread was unsatisfying which eventually led to the final outcome, the introduction of the mould element. This process of transforming the expired bread in its “pristine” condition to a different state with mould is a representation of my fascination with the materiality of food and also serves an artistic approach to portraying expired food with a

renewed significance. The images in the series “Old is Gold” records my journey in creating a photograph that experiments with the materiality of expired bread, inviting viewers to mainly contemplate the materiality of expired food in photographs and to identify possible associations to any cultural meanings when consuming them visually and literally.

The final image *Old is Gold #5* (See Figure 21), is a result that would not have been possible without the insights gained from the major research and the experiment done as part of the artistic inquiry, which includes the intellectual inquiry into my theoretical concerns and the imaginative inquiry by conducting many prior photo experiments to push the boundaries of my art practice. The valuable knowledge and the research process behind an artwork are often rendered inaccessible to the public because the artistic inquiry is highly intimate by nature and it is not common practice to articulate it into a written work. This thesis has addressed and presented the different layers of complexity that exists in my artistic inquiry, specifically focusing on the use of expired food as an artistic response to the materiality and subject matter of food in conveying a sense of culture.

Conclusion

It has been observed that the way food has been photographed as a form of material has evolved throughout the years. This progress can be traced from the modern application of food as a material of study for its formal qualities, from the photographs of Edward Weston to the postmodern use of food as a form of material to represent different national identities in Martin Parr's work. It is possible that the changes in approaches to photography are parallel to the developments of the camera as a medium and shifts in contemporary culture. Weston might have responded differently if the struggle to photograph his subject in greater detail is no longer a challenge he would face with the advancement of digital technology in recent years. Likewise, Parr would have utilised other deceptive devices instead of flash photography because natural light is now a favoured approach to documentary photography. The only constant that has remained thus far is how fine art food photographs have continued to be imposed with cultural implications based on the relationships between the camera's relationship to its mechanical materiality, the photographed subject and viewers' interpretation, and its relationship to the notion of representation. Regardless of whichever approach is applied to the creation of a fine art food photograph, the artist is still fundamentally required to be aware of the mechanics and concepts of photography, as well as the cultural implications surrounding the artist and the photographed subject. Only then, the artist is enabled to develop creative solutions in response to convey his/her artist intention(s) within the photographed food image.

The analysis on fine art food photographs by the five selected photographers was a good reference point for this project, but oftentimes the works alone did not reveal the arduous process of how these artists arrived at their solutions. As a result, the thoughts behind their creative processes have remained fairly inaccessible for the public or interested audiences. Therefore, by articulating and theorising my practice into this research paper, I hope to

encourage more artists to similarly pen down their artistic processes in writing so that this important structural information and the insights gained from their artistic process can then be made more transparent to the public.

There is potential for future research. If given the opportunity, I would like to expand on the existing ideas and concepts established in this project by experimenting on other types of expired food and observe how the fungus will respond to various environmental conditions. I might also perform an in-depth theoretical study of fungus to understand more about its natural behaviour which might lead me to potential methods of introducing them in different ways to other expired food products. Furthermore, I wish to extend the reviewing and analysis of the outcome of my research to an open group of viewers to test and analyse the extent to which the artistic intent behind my works have been communicated to others through the viewing experience. As this project of artistic research is heavily dependent on myself as an artist and a researcher to review and analyse the results of my own experimental photographs as part of the self-reflexive practice, I hope to explore other ways to bridge the gap between the artist, the work and the viewer.

I believe that there is no end to an artistic inquiry. Be it acquiring of new knowledge, making mistakes along the way, identifying new problems in the artistic process or producing purposeless results, each of these experiences will contribute in one way or another to the final outcome. For example, my research began with a focus on using edible food as an artistic material which eventually shifted to inedible ones. The initial photo experiments revealed my subconscious resistance towards the destructive outcomes of edible food as part of the artistic process. The image *Old is Gold #5* represents the ultimate outcome of my artistic inquiry to date, where I delved into using expired food as a response towards food as an artistic material and subject matter to convey a sense of culture. I hope that the information in this paper can provide useful guidance for photographers who are interested in practicing food photography

from an artistic perspective and practice-led researchers who are interested in articulating their artistic practice into an articulated form of research.

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