

VEGAS **seven**
THIS WEEK IN YOUR CITY



Let Them See Cake

Wendy Kveck cooks up thought-provoking confection reflections of consumers and the consumed

By Cindi Moon Reed
June 7th, 2012



Photo by **Kin Lui**

Kveck, Cosmopolitan's artist in residence, paints the "bride" cake while modeling a headpiece for the June 7 performance.

It's the Sunday night of Memorial Day weekend, and the Cosmopolitan is so busy that you have to park down the street. Inside, the casino teems with the usual array of guests—all dressed to the nines, which means plenty of sequins, bachelorette sashes and tiaras. You follow the crowd to the third floor, where it surges from the elevators and filters to the floor's restaurants, lounge areas and to the metal dividers, where many will wait in long lines for Marquee Nightclub.

On your way to any of those places, you notice two small rooms with glass walls. In one room, you see a lady applying "frosting" to one of three giant cakes with a paintbrush. If you dare to walk in and leave the raging night behind, you will be welcomed by the painter, Wendy Kveck, into a Down the Rabbit Hole version of the scene outside. Here, everything is candy colored, bright and fun ... and tinted with a mysterious, almost lurid, undertone. Paintings of drunken women with familiar faces are visible from the next room, and an ear-catching electronic song plays on loop.

This is the P3 Studio, and Kveck, its latest artist-in-residence, will eagerly welcome you into this transition. The UNLV adjunct art instructor and curator/gallery director of Winchester Cultural Center Gallery and Government Rotunda Gallery will even hand you the paintbrush for your own cake-painting photo. She'll play "Guess the Drunken Celebrity" with you. Or she'll discuss the socio-cultural meaning of her art. She does her best to judge the experience you want, but at least once the teacher elicited a "Whoa, that's deep" from a buzzed tourist.

The few that dare venture in tend to get to the point right off: *Can you eat the cakes?*

Kveck smiles at the thought. She views the illusion of edibility as a sign of success. Composed of cardboard tubes and a cement-like mixture, the cakes are the focal point of her exhibit, *The Pageant of the Amuse Bouche*. Each is made to resemble ancient Greek

columns called caryatids (giant women holding up a building), and each of those represent a deity in Kveck's Las Vegas pantheon: showgirl, bachelorette and bride. Similar to the neo-pagan construct of the maid, the mother and the crone, these goddesses could represent the three stages in a woman's life (or perhaps even the three stages in a tourist's visit).

Like an all-you-can-eat buffet, Kveck's exhibit seems to offer ever-unfolding courses. Each aspect of the relatively small show is layered upon another aspect, a new joy or point of understanding. Take, for example, the "sound piece," which plays in the background. It's actually a recording of six women telling stories about the show's themes. Kveck enlisted San Francisco artist Mark Grothman to sample them to create an abstract musical loop. All but a few words are indecipherable, but they're there. The music crescendos to a dizzying climax, compressing the arc of a drunken night out into a four-minute loop.

Kveck is interested in the idea of women as both "consumers and the consumed." An exploration of that concept underlies the entire show, and it often manifests itself through the inclusion of food. The whole women-as-cakes thing is only the beginning. "Amuse bouche," from the show's title, refers to the passed appetizers at so many Las Vegas parties (the literal French translation is "mouth pleaser"). The walls in the studio's second room display a selection of art from Kveck's past shows, and each has to do with consumption in some way. They range from an oil painting of a woman eating cake to collages featuring the bodies of magazine models with the heads of women with meat and icing on their faces (taken from Kveck's past installations).

The series of drunken celebrities—painted from found images of Britney Spears, Courtney Love, et al—bear names such as "Wasted," "Mad Woman," "Blotto" and "Drunken Phone Call II." (Needless to



Photo by Kin Lui

Plans for the cakes on display.



Photo by Kin Lui

Kveck's "candies."

The Pageant of the Amuse Bouche
by Wendy Kveck at the
Cosmopolitan's P3 Studio, 6-11
p.m. Wed-Sun, through June 10,
artist reception 7-9 p.m. June 7
with "living sculptures," free.

say, they've proven very popular among a certain class of viewer.) They depict women who have consumed to the point of intoxication. That second and third consumption—pop culture's consumption of those images and the viewer's consumption of Kveck's reinterpretation of those images—are subtler. You're more likely to notice that the stacked oil paint becomes clownish when viewed closely, which carries its own equally relevant metaphor. The interpretation is, of course, up to

you. Just don't expect to keep it to yourself. Kveck's show includes a circular table with chairs, postcards and markers. Signs invite viewers to write their thoughts about beauty and sensuality (the showgirl); partying and strong friendships (the bachelorette); love and weddings (the bride). Albums that are scattered on the table contain postcards from past visitors and snapshots of feminine rituals. The most memorable ones are from a staged bachelorette party with the bride played by local artist Danielle Kelly.

The table is set up kind of like a tea party. In the center is a tiered serving tray bearing what appears to be a variety of colorful and tempting candies. They look straight out of the "Just the Right Amount of Wrong" print ads for the Cosmo or perhaps they're delivered from the Wicked Spoon buffet. But the candies are in fact Kveck's creation (a recipe of expanding foam sealant and a few other secret ingredients)—decorations that visitors can glue onto the cakes.

You weren't going to participate. You're too shy, and, besides, you're late to meet your friends. But the marshmallow-cream-like confections are irresistible. Kveck shows you her reference drawings and guides you to a cake. With her direction, you add your contribution to these muses, admire your work and re-enter the night with a new lens through which to see the Vegas spectacle.