
Although the organic movement has been around since the early twentieth century, interest in food, methods of food production, packaging, and consumerism in general have gathered momentum in recent years. Grocery stores, supermarkets, and their accoutrements offer a glimpse into both the mundane aspects of modern culture and simultaneously reveal surprising insights into Americans’ commonality and differences. It is against this backdrop of modern interest in the business of food that Emily Stamey has curated the exhibition Stocked: Contemporary Art from the Grocery Aisles and the companion book of the same name.

Stamey’s book offers greater insight into the exhibition but can also stand alone as an overview of the works that share the grocery store theme. Stamey further breaks down the works in her exhibit into topics, which she thoroughly explores in her well-researched commentary. With sub-sections on “Lists,” “Carts and Codes,” “Aisles and Shelves,” “Containers and Labels,” and “Abundance and Community,” Stamey brings out various aspects of these works of art for further contemplation and discussion. Occasionally her conclusions are a bit far-fetched, but in general, she has done a thorough job analyzing and researching the various works, their context, the artists’ commentaries and historical background. The majority of the artists featured are either American or Canadian, with a few European artists included, but it should be noted that the book includes work from We Wai Kai First Nation artist, Sonny Assu, and Karyn Olivier, who is based in the United States, but hails from Trinidad and Tobago, which gives the book some non-mainstream American perspective.

Unfortunately, the visual joke of the brown paper “grocery bag” jacket cover could present a problem in library settings, and the binding quality is a bit disappointing, but otherwise the abundance of well-produced photographs from the exhibition that accompany Stamey’s text provides an excellent overview of the selected works.

The images are both varied and compelling and the writing style is accessible. The detailed background and context provided for both the individual works as well as the exhibit would make this an excellent addition in most art libraries, particularly those with an emphasis on undergraduate study and applied arts.

Christina Salazar, Systems Librarian, John Spoor Broome Library, California State University, Channel Islands, christina.salazar@csuci.edu