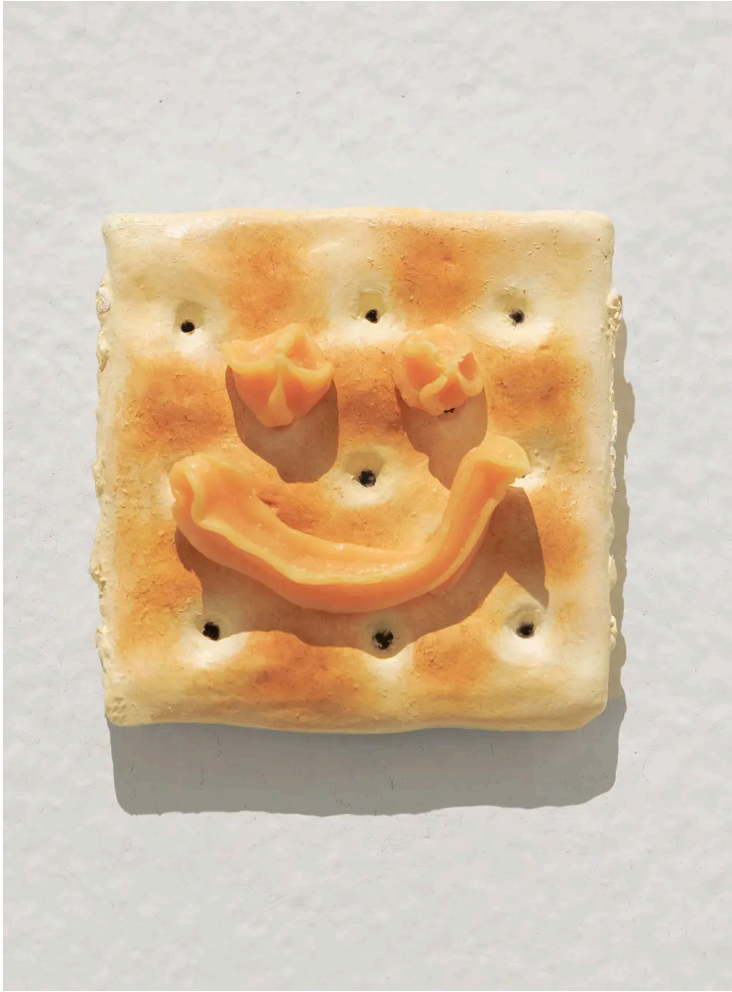


Everyday Items, Carefully Fabricated by an Artist and on View in St. Louis



Left: Tamara Johnson's "Cracker With Cheese" (2024). Right: Johnson's "Waffle Cone Column" (2024). © Tamara Johnson. Photos, from left: courtesy of the Saint Louis Art Museum; Trey Burns

By Kate Guadagnino

At first glance, Tamara Johnson's sculptures might strike you as nothing much. This is because they *almost* appear to be the very things they're depicting, and because those things are decidedly humble: a colander, a dish sponge, a saltine cracker adorned with a cheese-from-a-can smiley face. Once you learn that these pieces, which appear in Johnson's solo show at the St. Louis Art Museum, "Currents 123," are intricately fabricated, and always by the Dallas-based artist herself, you will inevitably wonder how. For the saltine, she made a rubber mold and poured pewter into its void, then finished the result with oil paint. The cheese

was cast separately with pigmented resin. Johnson's homemade readymades, as she calls them, nod to artistic heavyweights such as Marcel Duchamp, Susan Collis and, in the case of her column of concrete waffle cones, Constantin Brancusi, while interrogating the value we ascribe (or don't) to the domestic and Americana. But even as it looks outward, her work is sneakily biographical. Johnson considers her take on the ubiquitous monobloc lawn chair to be a self-portrait — the (faux) plain saltines affixed to it allude to her bouts of vertigo — and, after becoming a mother put her in closer touch with her own mortality, she started crafting a strip of raffle-style tickets with one ticket for each day she's been alive. The strip hangs from the gallery's coffered ceiling and pools on a plinth alongside the mordantly funny "Finger Keychain" (2020-24), which mimics the severed silicone type you might find at a Halloween store and commemorates a close call that Johnson had with an angle grinder in the studio this past winter. She likes the idea of fixing an object in time but also of making one that moves through it. "I'm stamping the tickets with dates and have gotten as far as February 1987," says Johnson, 39, "so there's more work to be done." *On view through Sept. 22, slam.org.*
