

Press Release

March 22
May 10, 2025Opening
Saturday, March 22, 2025
from 11am to 8pm

Sweet Tooth

Oli Epp & Anton Alvarez

The term “sweet tooth” describes a preference for sugary treats like candies, sometimes extending to a general taste for pleasure and indulgence. In the visual sphere, a preference for “eye candy” usually implies an irresistible attraction toward an enhanced, exaggerated, or plasticized version of reality. In their homonymous two-person exhibition at Semiose, Anton Alvarez and Oli Epp proudly embrace their “sweet-toothedness” through a painting and sculpture presentation. Drawing from Pop Art’s use of bright colors, sharp graphic imagery, and exaggerated finishes, they expose their (and our) compulsive attachment to consumerist aesthetics, the allure of design and technology, and our inherited bedazzlement with shiny, colorful things. Through multiple layers of tension and harmony between conflicting and compatible traits of their respective practices, mediums, mind sets, and concepts, the two artists are also suggesting that eye candy is not just a simple form of attraction or aesthetic pleasure but a complex phenomenon deeply embedded in the commodification of the human experience.

Arguably dominating the presentation is Epp’s *The Snail* (2025), a homage to Henri Matisse’s large-scale gouache découpée, *The Snail* (1953), a work that is often cited as an example of redefining abstraction and bridging painting and sculpture through collage. Using one of the most famous late pieces by one of the undisputed masters of 20th-century art as the formal guideline, the London-based artist constructs that distinctive synergy between traditional realism elements and the synthetic, balloon-like shapes or graphic flat planes. The bold orange, green, blue, red, and purple are used initially as an expressive force in an otherwise clean, graphic image and a way to break with historical realism. By reimagining these solid, gouache-painted paper cut-outs as lustrous jewels, Epp blends opulence and irony, transforming a humble creature into a dazzling symbol of desire and excess. Artificially mounted on a tongue-poking, cartoonish protagonist, this realistic “bling” forms a cheeky critique of consumerist values while cherishing the interplay of nature and artifice. Rendered as a trompe-l’oeil accessory, these gems almost float above the image, as if ready for consumption and enjoyment by the observer. With its surreal concept, the work also taps into the artist’s ongoing interest in fragility, transformation, and playful decadence, not missing the chance to tie the presentation to its location with the image of a French culinary delicacy and a metaphor for slow, deliberate living.

This sense of playful decadence and the influence of Matisse’s simplified use of Modernist colors are some of the key qualities exhibited in Alvarez’s works featured in the presentation. The Chilean-Swedish artist fabricates his ceramic sculptures using a self-built machine, The Extruder. This innovative approach to ceramics and sculpture blends automation and manual intervention, producing pieces that resemble melting or morphing artifacts or pillars. Purposely stepping away from the traditional hand-building or wheel-throwing techniques, chance and material behavior play a significant role in these works’ final form. While the technical aspects of the process are carefully calculated and planned, the final execution, from shaping to selecting glazes, follows a more intuitive approach—much like Matisse’s use of color. Alvarez’s process allows for a full spectrum of expression within the extremely limiting and unconventionally removed way of creating. This results in confusingly rigid yet seemingly soft, organic-like forms that rely on the evident synergy of industrial production and traditional craft. Honoring the limitations regarding available glazes, the color of individual work

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aims to emphasize its shape and/or create an illusion about the material used. As such, particular examples might appear as if done with Play-Doh-type material, suggesting this odd blend of splendor and absurdity. Moving away from classical forms toward modern technology, design, and eye candy-like values, Alvarez's work aligns with and emphasizes the core ideas behind both practices while exploring and promoting the ever-changing concept of beauty.

With aligned and complementary interests, Epp and Alvarez pushed each other to conceive and produce works that distil a range of ideas into a more minimalist but highly complementing visual format. Although their works may appear distinct at first glance, their shared concepts suggest how intricately linked and almost uniform we are in contemporary society. Through aesthetics that rely on flattened or morphed forms, exaggerated proportions, and intense surfaces—either glossy or matte—both artists produce enticing, overindulgent works whose artificial appeal evokes candy-like nature. Such bright, shiny, sugar-coated allure is meant to evoke childhood, nostalgia, and an almost dopamine-like response, making the viewer both drawn in and perhaps slightly overwhelmed. Like biting into a scrumptious candy and feeling that humbling sugar sting, these saccharine aesthetics are intentionally designed to captivate the viewer, only to expose the deeper truths beneath—how visual appeal has been commodified in modern society, shaping our perceptions of value, beauty, and identity.

Saša Bogojev