



Combining her two loves, for photography and for gardening, artist Ivana George creates provocative images that encourage conversation about sustainability.

BY CHRIS REAGLE
PHOTOGRAPHY BY IVANA GEORGE



Quincy photographer and mixed media artist Ivana George is an avid gardener whose latest collection of images explores the topic of food sustainability in a provocative and humorous manner. Recently exhibited at Bridgewater State University where George is an associate professor of art, the "Sustain" series serves as a springboard for George's wider mission to make urban gardening a normal part of city living.

"My work is inspired by the Victory Garden movement,"

says George, referencing a World War II government initiative that promoted the planting of gardens in backyards and public lands in an effort to reduce pressure on the public food supply. "I'm really interested in the idea of urban sustainability because when you grow your own food you eliminate the pollution associated with its transport," she says.

George's images are designed to evoke a nostalgic aesthetic. "I use a technique of mixed media and digital photography image transfer on aluminum to create these



unique artworks in warm tones that recall the historic tintype photo process," she says. Using an analog 8" x 10" camera, a tripod and a self-timer, George takes stylized self-portraits surrounded by Swiss chard, rhubarb and heirloom tomatoes. She sets the camera to take 10 frames about three seconds apart, so she has time to change her pose between photographs. Her unorthodox compositions convey a sense of humor and sensuality. "I think it makes the work more relatable," says George.

While the photos can be somewhat spontaneous, there is a certain level of planning that goes into each shot, from color design to clothing (George is known for donning vintage fashions in her photographs). Lighting is also key. George prefers to take photos in the late afternoon or early morning. "I try to emphasize the beauty

and colors of the vegetables and fruits through my use of lighting," she says. "I use the sun as a backlight, which helps delineate forms from the background and I shine my studio light on the scene that's being photographed. This method creates visual drama."

With a master's degree from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts at Tufts University, George says that her gestures, poses and choice of lighting

are inspired by Baroque and Neo-Classical works of art. "I exclude my face on purpose because I don't want the viewer to focus on me as a person, but on the enjoyment of the food and the really powerful experience of connecting with the life-giving capacities of the earth," she says.

When it comes to gardening, George is passionate about preserving biodiversity. She plants certain types of flowers in her garden in order to attract and feed bees. "The nasturtium is a good food source for the bees because the blossoms are really big, and bees can see them from the sky," says George. "The bees pollinate everything in the garden because of the flowers I plant for them."

"I'm really interested in the idea of urban sustainability because when you grow your own food you eliminate the pollution associated with its transport."

George sees her latest series as a natural progression of her artistic pursuits and her life. Being the wife of accomplished chef Shane Gray, executive pastry chef for Columbus Hospitality Group in Boston, having a backyard garden was a no-brainer.

The couple built raised garden beds in the corner of their Quincy property where they had the best sunlight and their urban garden now offers flavorful in-season produce throughout the summer and into the fall. They employ non-toxic growing methods, composting their kitchen waste, using biodegradable weed cloth and hay to keep uninvited growth at bay and a hose drip irrigation system to help conserve water. "We started really small and then

over time we got better at what we were doing," says George. "My husband has taught me a lot about food. He's basically converted me into a foodie over time."

George hopes that her Sustain series provides food for thought. "A rapidly growing human population requires that everyone conserve water resources and maintain a habitable climate," she says. "It's important for everyone to understand how to make more sustainable choices regarding food, both for personal health and to live in greater harmony with the environment." 🌱

For more information on the artist, visit ivanadamiengeorge.com.

