

06/17/2009

Shake-N-Make's Homespun Angst at MKG127



Summer's a good time for a little warm and fuzzy

homespun craft, but if you're from Hamilton, that can mean something entirely different. Take the current show at MKG127, Michael Klein's always-excellent space on Ossington Avenue. It's from the Hamilton collective Shake-N-Make, and it is, in simplest term, a gleefully noir-ish recollection of a childhood hatched in the anxious era of the 70s.

After the repressed, imposed normalcy of the 50s and the mass social upheaval of the 60s, the anxiety fallout of the decade intensified with the Cold War, energy crises, and shockingly horrific fashion options. So it was normal -- if more than a little disingenuous -- to retreat to the homely comforts of craft. The show, I Can't Stop This Feeling, shows a collection of such things, but produced by anxious compulsion, perhaps, in an effort to self-distract. I'm thinking of an array of velour cozies, for tea and anything else (I think one was for a toaster; the others come across as nervous perpetual sewing projects of indeterminate form and function).

And then, there's the portrait wall of such luminaries as Jimmy Carter and Rene Levesque (Vive Le Quebec Libre!) rendered in Shrinky Dinks, a fleeting 70s kiddie fascination -- requiring, in what could very well be illegal in this kidsafe age, a scorchingly hot oven to make -- about which I can only say: You had to be there (I was; made a keychain or two of them myself).

But the pieces I really love, for their subtle, simmering repressed domestic angst, are derived from images like the one above, from the Betty Crocker recipe card library. Betty, icon of picture-perfect homemakerhood as she is, by the 70s was surely looking a little out of place in the burgeoning feminist era that exploded after the sexual revolution; a lot of the art of that era addressed gender roles, usually with the subtlety of a meat cleaver.

A few decades on, and with the benefit of hindsight, Shake-N-Make offer a quiet, humour-infused provocation of smouldering desperation. Accompanying recipes for Betty's favourites, like a Ladybug birthday cake, complete with dayglo ju-jubes and sprinkles that were no doubt bursting with Red Dye #2 (it was my sister's 5th birthday cake; it might help explain her early hyper-activity) read slices of narrative suggesting a behind-the-scenes, Ice Storm-esque reality to Betty's picture-perfect domestic fantasy.



**FONDUES 25**

**AMBER FONDUES**

70 The Betty Crocker Recipe Card Library

**BUTTERS-COTCH FONDUE**

1/4 cup sugar	1 cup light cream (20%)
1/2 cup light corn syrup	1/2 teaspoon vanilla or
1/4 teaspoon salt	1 tablespoon rum
1/4 cup butter or margarine, softened	Dippers (below)

Mix sugar, corn syrup, salt, butter and 1/2 cup of the cream. Cook over low heat, stirring occasionally, to 234° on candy thermometer or until small amount of mixture dropped into cold water forms a soft ball.

Stir in remaining cream. Cook to 226° on candy thermometer or until mixture is thick, smooth consistency. Remove from heat; stir in vanilla. Pour into dessert fondue pot to keep warm. Spear Dippers and swirl in fondue. About 2 cups.

**HONEY-APRICOT FONDUE**

*He was a regular. The girls knew him by name and even said hello to him when they saw him on the street. Even so, they knew he was there for Amber.*

*He might've said he was in love, but only if you defined love as something that caused you to memorize a girl's moves, the way her body flowed, and to live for the few moments the might smile at you.*

*Amber was good. Over and over again he would replay in his mind the way she wrapped her caramel legs around the pole and tossed her honey brown hair. To him it always seemed to happen in slow motion -- a slow supple melting of limbs, a dripping of beauty on the stage.*

©Copyright 1971 by General Mills, Inc. All rights reserved. Printed in U.S.A.