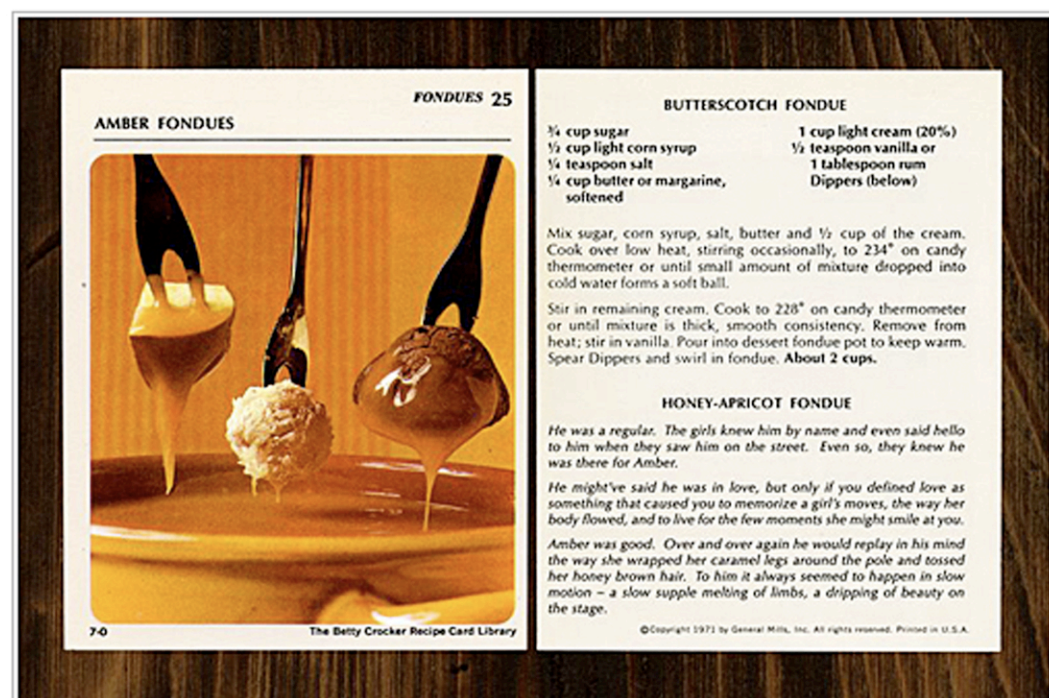


Survival and the Seventies at MKG127

I'm grateful June is almost over as this whole month has been the death of good intentions, one of which was to go see *I Can't Stop This Feeling: Crisis, Comfort and Craft* at [MKG 127](#). Of course, this exhibition closes June 27 and while I will be in Toronto tomorrow, it'll be to watch the Blue Jays play the Philadelphia Phillies, which made seeing this show a today-or-nothing proposition. In short, time to fire up the Mustang and hit the QEW.



I Can't Stop This Feeling reflects the fused anxiety and nostalgia of three Hamilton-based artists - Claudia Manley, Liss Platt and Steph Rogerson - who came together to form the Shake N' Bake collective after discovering a collection of vintage Betty Crocker recipe cards. Those cards were definitely part of my own fascination with this show given that my mother still has this complete set of recipe cards in their original puke-green plastic box. Even though I'm an eighties kid myself, I recall spending a lot of time playing with these cards for some unknown reason (maybe they were already exotic one decade later) and seeing an enlarged version of that coveted ladybug cake was a delight in itself.



What sustains the show beyond childhood nostalgia, however, is the insertion of subversive snippets of text into the recipe, reflective of the fine 70s cuisine on offer but heavily charged with the dissolution of the domestic bliss propped up by Betty Crocker's easy entertainment solutions. That crisis of the modern family reflects the wider social crises of the 1970s that inform the exhibition as a whole, as stated by the artists:

Planes were hijacked, gas was in short supply, the traditional family was in flux, and an American president resigned in disgrace. Through the lens of Afterschool Specials, we saw the world as a crisis waiting to happen; we learned that trauma was just beyond the wood paneled walls of our Rec room.

That impending uncertainty lurks in much of the work, and most convincingly in the various tasseled velvet cozies, some vaguely reminiscent of kitchen appliances while others are in themselves monstrous for their very lack of clear identification. From my own biased perspective, they mirror the cheap horrors of the era's science fiction television like transfigured *Doctor Who* aliens or bad set designs from *Star Trek* (yes, the kick-ass new film has driven me back to the original, it's an experience to say the least), and provide an optic by which to understand the domestic setting that informed that era's anxieties.



This collision of pervasive media and fastidiously escapist craft, and the extent to which this era is increasingly a foreign country, is exemplified in the accident of *Night Bloom*, a vintage television set cradled in a macrame hanger complete with handmade television-shaped beads knotted into its tassels. I consider this work a fortuitous mistake (or perhaps the artists anticipated this) in that the television is installed to broadcast a signal that is now ineffective as the recent switch to digital television during the exhibition's run has since cut the picture while leaving the sound haunting intact. To further drive the obsolescence home, the discernible murmurs of that television today were full of commentary on Michael Jackson's death; as the television in the next room just intoned at me while I write this, his death is 'a key moment in pop cultural history,' one that separates the present-day from this exhibition's wood-vener past.



In an added note of bittersweetness, the cluster of cameo portraits on [Shrinky Dinks](#) includes among its various 70s personalities a quintessential image of Farrah Fawcett in all her feathered-haired glory. Mounted on lustrous gold velvet, her modest icon, combined with the fabulous *Charlie's Angels* banner nearby, provided a space in which the woman could be given due reverence in this lively memorial to childhood.

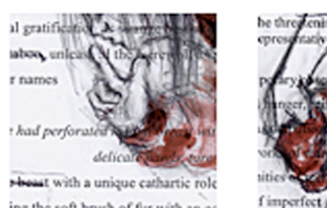
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