

h a u n t

Soap Eggs Grapes

by Kathryn Lien

3 green chicken eggs

A bunch of grapes

1 C alginate

1C cold water

Glycerin soap

Additional bare grape stem

Eat the grapes with intent. Hold a grape between two fingers and tug until you feel the grape skin just separate from the stem at the point of rupture. Leave the stem whole. Leave the stem bare. The pedicel reaches out in its newfound futility, grasping for the single body that it had grown to meet. Set aside four grapes: two of the largest and two of the smallest.

Laverne and Shirley would peck so often that they had to be moved to a separate run. Chickens can be surprisingly temperamental. They wear chicken saddles - not for riding - but to protect their bodies from their more aggressive counterparts. This clothing functions more like Kevlar vests than saddles.

An Ameraucana wearing a chicken saddle lays light green eggs. If the chickens do not live near a rooster, their egg production can be induced with their diet. The male is unnecessary for the chicken to produce. The laying season dwindles as the days get shorter, as darkness halts production. During a bright, early autumn, the Ameraucana should lay one egg per day. Check the coop every morning and collect one egg. After three days, you should have three eggs.

Nest the eggs in a bowl next to the four grapes and the bare stem.

Alginic acid lives in the cell walls of brown algae, becoming a viscous gum when it comes into contact with water. A plastic drinking cup makes a fine flask for an alginate mold. Nontoxic and inexpensive, commercially available alginate is perfectly suited to make dental molds. Pour 1 C of alginate into your plastic cup. Add 1 C of cold water. Stir until no dry parts remain. The alginate should be thin enough to slowly swallow the egg but not so thin that the egg meets the bottom of the cup. Place an egg upright in the center of the mixed alginate and gently press down. When the alginate sets fully, invert the cup and slide the mold into your hand. With a razor blade, slice smoothly into the soft mold until you feel the tip of the blade meet the hard shell of the egg. Tracing the shell's edge, make a vertical slice in the alginate to sever the mold into two halves. Remove the egg. Place the mold back into the cup and cut a small pour hole at the top.

Repeat with two remaining eggs. ^{1*}

Repeat with four remaining grapes. ^{2**}

She eats the rest of the bunch, overflowing a bowl with the small remaining bounty of oblong berries. She saves the bare stems the next few times she eats grapes, in case I may need them.

Alginate molds leak. Be sure to pour off excess water and pat with a paper towel before using. Place a grape stem into the cavity of an egg mold so that the stem protrudes out of the mold's pour hole. Repeat with a second egg mold.

Saponification occurs when fat, lye, and water are combined to make soap. Glycerin soap is translucent and melts easily. Soap cleans itself. Stir the glycerin soap in a saucepan over low heat until all of the solids have melted into a clear liquid. Pouring through a funnel, fill the alginate molds with the hot melted soap. They will bubble and foam as the alginate leaches water into the hot soap. Rattle the sides of each cup to bust air bubbles that may be trapped inside.

^{1*} Eat the eggs.

^{2**} Do not eat the grapes.



Wait 24 hours.

Place a hand over the mouth of one of the plastic cups and upend to release the alginate mold into your palm. Slide any excess soap off the exterior of the mold and gently pry the alginate apart at the seam. Release the egg or grape. Clean the exterior of the egg or grape with a slightly damp finger. The bare grape stem should be visible through the clean exterior of the soap egg in which it was cast. Take another bare grape stem and press a soap grape onto a pedicel until the pedicel penetrates the grape just enough to hold the grape in place. Repeat with remaining three soap grapes.

Using a sharp blade, remove the bottom portion of a single soap egg so that the egg sits on a flat surface at a forty-five degree angle.

Set the bare grape stem with attached soap grapes next to the seated soap egg. Lean the soap egg grapes alongside the bare grape stem with attached soap grapes so that the protruding stem meets the bare grape stem, as though they have always grown together.

† Kathryn Lien is an artist from Southeastern Pennsylvania. After receiving her BFA from University of Washington in Seattle she worked as the Visual Arts Coordinator at the Vermont Studio Center in Johnson, VT, which she later attended as a Pollock-Krasner Fellow. Kathryn is a current MFA candidate in the Sculpture + Extended Media program at Virginia Commonwealth University and, following her graduation, will make a swift return to living and working in Philadelphia.

Photograph pg. 24

“Soap Egg Grapes”, 2017

Image courtesy of Jessica Lawrence

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Haunt Journal of Art

Volume 4

2017

ISSN 2334-1165 (PRINT)

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