

Of Foods & Herbs

Melli Ink

October 03, 2025 – Februar 26, 2026

Opening hours: Fridays from 11 - 18 h and
upon appointment.

In her new body of work, Melli Ink explores one of the most primal and universal aspects of human culture: what we eat. Food is sustenance, ritual, memory, pleasure—and also a mirror of society, reflecting its desires, contradictions, and politics.

Fast vs. slow. Convenient vs. cultivated. Processed vs. healing.

In *Of Foods & Herbs*, these opposing forces collide in a vivid, theatrical narrative: instant gratification meets ancient herbal wisdom; mass production confronts tradition; the politics of appetite take shape, both material and metaphorical.

The exhibition unfolds like a story in three chapters.

The first space is staged as a 1950s American diner: red-and-white striped, almost dizzying walls, gleaming, seating with a happy meal, and a vitrine filled with mouth-blown glass sculptures of sushi, avocados, ramen.. Their cartoon-like eyes give them a mischievous vitality, recalling the enchanted characters of Miyazaki films. In the center, a monumental plush hamburger, almost human-sized, looms like a surreal mascot of desire and excess—a soft monument with a wink toward Claes Oldenburg's pop-sculpture legacy. Here, indulgence is playful but also unsettling, revealing the seduction of speed, convenience, and processed perfection.

The second space offers a quiet reversal. Glass sculptures of vegetables—peas in a pod, radishes, cauliflower—stand proudly on individual pedestals, celebrated in their singularity. They are represented almost like an exquisite luxury objects. Facing them are large-scale photographs that imagine these same vegetables thriving in lush, almost dreamlike garden settings. Together, they form a dialogue between cultivation and imagination, between the tangible object and its mythic origin, bridging the distance between earth and image, nature and narrative.

At the heart of the room, a vegetable face emerges from a vitrine, recalling Giuseppe Arcimboldo's allegorical portraits of the seasons. Like Arcimboldo's Mannerist compositions, it celebrates abundance while hinting at decay, suggesting the fragile cycles that bind nature, culture, and consumption. Surrounding the vitrine are delicate drawings that evoke the encyclopedic studies of Maria Sibylla Merian, whose 17th-century illustrations fused art and natural history. These works extend Ink's meditation on preservation and decay, turning the gallery into a living archive of both memory and desire.

The final room brings all the threads together. At its center is a banquet table reminiscent of a Dutch Baroque still life, but entirely rendered in glass. Flowers inspired by Ink's native Austrian landscape—some healing, some poisonous—are arranged in a composition that will never wilt, a frozen hymn to transience and permanence.

Throughout *Of Foods & Herbs*, Melli Ink demonstrates her mastery of staging and storytelling. Her practice moves seamlessly between sculpture, photography, drawing, and installation, weaving cultural history with personal narrative. By placing fast food alongside healing herbs, processed snacks alongside ancestral knowledge, she invites viewers to reflect on their own appetites and the broader systems—ecological, economic, emotional—that shape them.

At once playful and profound, the exhibition offers a feast for the senses and a quiet provocation: what we consume, in every sense, ultimately consumes us.

Melli Ink (b. 1972, Innsbruck, Austria) lives and works in Zurich, Switzerland. She studied Theatre Design at Central Saint Martins, London, and began her career designing sets and costumes for theatre, opera, and film before shifting her focus to the visual arts. This background continues to inform her immersive, narrative-driven practice, which spans sculpture, installation, film, and performance.

Her work draws inspiration from art history, literature, film, music, and popular culture, as well as from her Alpine heritage. Ink collaborates closely with master artisans—glassblowers, metalworkers, and others—reviving disappearing traditional techniques while transforming them into contemporary artistic expressions. By juxtaposing materials such as glass, mountain crystal, metal, and ceramics, she creates intricate worlds that explore contrasts between fragility and permanence, tradition and innovation, the sacred and the everyday.

Recent exhibitions include *Arts& Nature* in Villa Arconati Milano (2025), *Eccentric – Ästhetik der Freiheit* at the Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich (2024), *Weight of Illumination* at Villa Anna, Cernobbio (2024), *Backstage Engelberg* (2024), *Raggiro* at Borgovico33, Como (2023), Lake Como Design Festival at Villa Olmo (2023), *Female Voices* at Grieder Contemporary, Küsnacht (2022), and *Enchanted Forest* at Grieder Contemporary, Küsnacht (2021).

Melli Ink's works have been presented at major international art fairs such as Art Basel, Art Basel Miami Beach, Art Basel Hong Kong, and The Armory Show, New York, and are part of significant private and public collections across Europe, the USA, and Asia.

Through her theatrical approach and meticulous craftsmanship, Ink transforms disappearing traditions into vibrant contemporary narratives, bridging past and present.

The exhibition can be visited every Friday from 11 am to 6 pm and by appointment. For further information and images, please contact Petra Tomljanovic at info@grieder-contemporary.com or call +41 43 818 56 07.