

Photographer of the Year 2019

Brenda Reilly

When Photographer of the Year Brenda Reilly searched for a source of subject matter, she went no further than where she worked to find a source rich in potential for her imaginative photographs. Reilly works at Jewel Food Stores and has turned to unusual and also banal fruits in the produce department as her inspiration. And what an inspiration these forms have proved!

Reilly investigates these subjects, rich in color, shape, form, texture and surface by considering them from afar, but also close in, and then plays with all that makes up the essence of these fruits. The presence of these subjects is dramatic and tangible, because of her play with composition, placement, and color interaction.

Her kiwano melon series is reminiscent of Baroque Dutch still life paintings, where every texture and nuance of surface is lovingly painted. Here, she emphasizes the juiciness of the inside, with occasional splashes of juice, with the tougher spikey outside texture of the exotic fruit. The colors are intense and commanding. Adding to the drama is her placement of these fruits on a reflective surface, whether it be a mirror or metallic tray. This allows for contrast between the stark drama of the real fruit and its fuzzier and softened reflection. Reilly's emphasis on the dramatic contrast of color, value and texture of these fruits almost gives them personalities that attract the viewer to want to know them better.

Reilly also works with Dragon fruit, another bizarre-looking form from nature. These are characterized by not only a tough, colorful scarlet or deep yellow exterior with quirky shapes, but an inside freckled with tiny black seeds within white pulp. Reilly emphasizes through sharp focus the contrast between the almost decorative interior of the fruit with the leathery and scaled outside; she adds to the drama by adding black and white polka dot fabric in one image. The fruits nestle into the polka dots, with the dots echoing the tiny black seeds. These works are both dramatic and entertaining with their humorous appearance.

Finally, Reilly takes the mundane apple, yet presents these with drama and finesse. The apple colors, shininess and textures are emphasized against reflective surfaces to again make what would normally seem prosaic into subjects that feel celebrated and important. Her work with what might seem familiar things in our everyday lives are enhanced by her photographer's eye, selecting focus, placement and lighting that creates high drama in her pieces.