

# The miracle of good

**Kingston artist tackles the dark side of food and nutrition**

By Greg Burliuk  
Whig-Standard Staff Writer

There's nothing like art to bring out skills you never thought you had.

To look at Gjen Snider's exhibition *Miracle-Grow*, you'd think she has the greenest of thumbs. Its centerpiece is a small garden full of healthy green vegetable plants. When you learn that Snider is originally from Verona, you think her success with plants isn't surprising considering her rural roots.

But it turns out this is Snider's first garden and she was never enamored of living in the country.

"I couldn't wait to get out of the country and live in the city," she says.

At any rate, *Miracle-Grow* isn't about gardening. In fact, its inspiration lay in medical problems that dogged Snider for years.

"When I was a teenager, I had a spinal chord tumour that was removed, and then there were surgeries after that," she says. "Then, 10 years later when I was 23, I was told that maybe there was a recurrence of that tumour."

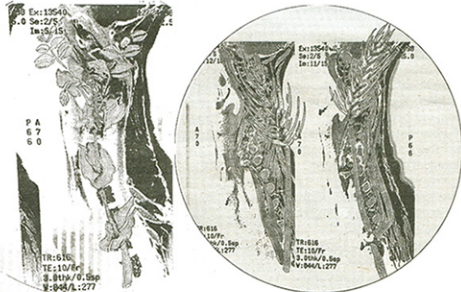
"While seeing doctors, I decided to look into food and nutrition, really anything that I could use to help my body. I began learning about something that was so basic. I grew up eating very well, but not thinking about it."

Then Snider discovered the book *Healing With Whole Foods* by Paul Pitchford, which combined Asian traditions with modern nutrition. She began following some of its practices with some success, bolstered by a *New York Times* article by food writer Michael Pollan, whose first lines began, "Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants. That, more or less, is the short answer to the supposedly incredibly complicated and confusing question of what we humans should eat in order to be maximally healthy."

"It was a good life project," she says of her decision to eat more healthily.

"And I don't know if that's the reason why, but the tumour stayed the same. It hasn't changed after four years and my doctor told me this April that I'd never have to deal with it again."

The good news from her doctor coincided with Snider's decision to



Gjen Snider's exhibit, *Miracle-Grow*, looks at human health and the economy of food.

resign as programming director of the Modern Fuel Artist-Rest Centre so she could devote more time to her own artistic career.

"I knew I wanted to do an exhibition but I didn't want one that was a self portrait," she says.

"And then I thought everyone is touched by what they eat."

And, being a founding member of the Artel, it was a natural place for her to stage her first solo exhibition.

*Miracle-Grow* has three major components: a slide show and a two-part installation. One part of that installation is the garden, a circular affair contained within what looks like a giant compartmentalized hospital food tray and contains vegetables, such as tomatoes, broc-

coli, lettuce and zucchini, and herbs such as dill. The plants appear to be fed from a plastic tube connected to a water tank in which empty pill boxes float. Snider calls this part of the installation *Collective Addiction a Marinade*, and it represents modern medicine's overemphasis on drugs rather than good food to cure people's ills.

Along with drugs, Snider questions the tendency to pop multi-vitamins "instead of eating your vitamins in fresh food."

The third part of the exhibition is an eight-minute long slide show with 12 sections. It alternates between x-rays of Snider and pictures of plants that look like the x-rays.

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Thursday, July 14, 2007  
The Kingston Whig-Standard

# food

## MIRACLE-GROW

**WHAT:** An exhibition about food and our attitude towards it by Kingston artist Gjen Snider.

**WHERE:** Artel, 205 Sydenham St.

**WHEN:** Until July 22. Open on Thursdays and Fridays from 2 p.m. to 7 p.m. and Saturdays and Sundays from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. There will also be a reception today at 7 p.m.

**MORE:** [www.the-artel.ca](http://www.the-artel.ca).

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"Some of them are a little bit off-putting to me because they do look so much like each other," she says.

Snider believes modern technology and the economic side of food have complicated the business of feeding ourselves.

"There isn't anything wrong with business, but there is something strange about importing goods that are available locally. Strange occurrences such as this ... are commonplace because of their importance and implications on our economic system," Snider says.

The relationship between the economy and food and its socio-economic implications interest the artist.

"I would say that this exhibition is hoping to communicate the need for wider public discourse about food amidst the growing greer movement, to make the most of the already present opportunity to consider change," she says.

"So, this exhibition hopes to inspire a more mindful relationship between mind and body through food and caring for our health."

And the name?

"The title is ironic as much as it is a suggestion of hope. *Miracle-Gro* is a synthetic grow product that manipulates living things to mature faster and stay healthier, longer, according to our needs and interests," Snider explains.

"*Miracle-Grow* is an exhibition that proposes the idea that we've made something as basic and fundamental as our health and eating too complex. I think this is because in part we want to believe that somehow, somewhere out there, there is a magic pill that will provide us with the answers. We're looking for convenience and miracles, but we've overstepped. It's all been in our backyard all along."



*Miracle-Grow*, Gjen Snider's installation at the Artel, is a critique of the political economy of the global food industry.

Harrison Smith/For The Whig-Standard

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