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View of "Valerie Hegarty: American Berserk," 2016.  
NEW YORK

## Valerie Hegarty

MALIN GALLERY  
515 West 29th Street  
October 6, 2016–January 21, 2017

Rotting, wounded, smiling—watermelons, in Valerie Hegarty's latest exhibition of paintings and sculptures, are depicted as sentient objects: carnal, threatening. Several

wedges of the fruit, done in ceramics, rest on a plinth, their pink flesh resembling gums and growing teeth, tongues, ribs, stalagmites, barnacles. They make one think of the chemically modified watermelons that spontaneously exploded across fields in China in 2011—a warning about the perils of mutant capitalism.

The title of Hegarty’s exhibition, “American Berserk,” comes from Philip Roth’s 1997 novel *American Pastoral*, where the writer describes the darker aspects of this idyllic genre. Hegarty intelligently references Raphaelle Peale, considered the first painter of still lifes in America, in a number of her grim watercolor works, such as *Watermelon Gothic 1*, *Fruit Face*, and *Picnic Body* (works cited, 2015). In the latter pair of edibles-as-people pictures, one can’t help but see homages to Giuseppe Arcimboldo, the sixteenth-century Italian painter whose portraits of notable Renaissance figures, rendered as agglomerations of vegetables, fish, and books, among other items, are more horrifying than charming.

Like Roth, Hegarty is drawn to this country’s damaged history, its warped psyche. Her watermelons are the stuff of colonialism, racist stereotyping, US avarice, and gluttony. Her fruits aren’t juicy, they’re *bleeding*—a lacerated bounty. The show, divided into four sections, feels a bit fragmented, as each area could be its own exhibition. But these separations only aid in reinforcing our sense of distance between the idealism of the American past and its sad, corrosive present.

— Heidi Harrington-Johnson

