
PAINT WITH YOUR FOOD

Artist Carmen Argote's 2019 New Museum exhibition inspires this activity. You can see images from "Carmen Argote: As Above, So Below" and hear her speak about the exhibition [on our website](#).

KEY WORDS

- **Dye:** a natural or synthetic substance used to add a color to or change the color of something
- **Consume:** to eat, drink, ingest; or to buy

START WITH ART: Carmen Argote





Carmen Argote (b. 1981, Guadalajara, Mexico; lives and works in Los Angeles) transforms diverse materials sourced from her surroundings into large works on paper and installations. She often uses plants, including food, fruits, and vegetables she can find locally, such as coffee, guava, oranges, lemon, and avocado, to make **dyes**. She is interested in relationships between spaces, bodies, transformation, labor, and consumption. Each material is not only a source of color, transforming the surface of paper; we can also ask questions about where it was grown, who harvested it, where and how it traveled, how and by whom it is **consumed**.

Argote created *Patio con Citrus / Patio with Citrus* during a residency in Guadalajara, Mexico, at the former home and studio of renowned Mexican muralist **José Clemente Orozco** (b.1883 –d.1949). She incorporated plants and fruit from Orozco’s central courtyard and gardens as well as other locally sourced produce as raw materials for creating these works. For this large piece she used **cochineal dye**. This dye is derived from an insect that has been considered precious to many indigenous cultures of Latin America for centuries as a source of vivid red color. It continues to be used globally as a natural dye. Argote also used lemon juice, which is acidic and acts like a bleach, swirling with the red of the cochineal. She pours the materials out on a very large sheet of paper. The home and studio site is on land with orange groves. To add a last layer of citrus to the piece, Argote invited people to join her in transporting an abundance of oranges she purchased at local markets to the courtyard patio where she was working.

- Do you think they used all of the oranges in the picture of the action “*Manéjese Con Cuidad*” (“*Drive Carefully*”) for this public action and collaboration? Have you ever seen so many oranges in one home? Who

would often see that many oranges on a regular basis and where? What workers are involved in oranges traveling from trees to a few that might be in your home?

- How would you describe the picture of the person (Carmen Argote) and her mural? Does it look like work, a dream, both, or something else? What kinds of actions and movements do you think she is using?
- What colors do you see in the final work and the picture of the action? Do they stir memories, feelings, or connections to things you know about from your experiences?
- Does your sense of the size of the painting change from seeing it alone, compared to seeing the picture of it in the courtyard surrounded by over a ton of oranges?

Look Around

- Read the labels on food and other products you **consume** and the list of ingredients. Do you see dyes and colors in the list of ingredients? Where do you think these colors come from? Can you look them up online and find out?
- What color is the food around you and at the market? How do the colors of these foods transform when they are cooked and prepared? Do they have a different color on the surface compared to when they are cut into or peeled? Do they change color over time?
- Are there foods that stain fingers, clothes, and teeth?

MAKE ART

Let's experiment with using food to make a colorful work on paper.

Materials

- White paper of any size. You may wish to experiment with different textures and weights of paper.
- Old clothes that can be stained, apron, or smock
- Cardboard or plastic to protect surfaces
- Small take-out or food containers that can hold liquid
- paint brush, and/or a sponge
- water
- One or more of the following: canned or fresh red beet, fresh or frozen spinach, ground or fresh turmeric root, carrot, fresh or thawed frozen raspberries and blueberries, red cabbage

Optional Materials (to be used with an adult helper)

- knife and cutting board
- vegetable peeler
- stove
- food processor

Making

1. Change into old clothing that can be stained, or protect your clothing by wearing an apron or smock (you can make one from cutting holes for arms and head in the sides of a plastic garbage bag).
2. Find a space outdoors, or cover surfaces with plastic or cardboard to protect them from staining.
3. Follow instructions below to experiment making and applying different colors with food to your paper.

Option A (requires less adult support)

- Ask an adult to help you cut vegetables, such as beets into halves or wedges, peel carrots or turmeric root, and provide small containers of a few berries, spinach, and cabbage leaves to use to experiment.
- In your work area, experiment with different actions--rubbing, rolling, squeezing, drawing--to make marks of different colors with the different food materials. Try wrapping, crumpling, covering, and folding the paper over different food times as well.
- Smooth out your paper, add more marks, or try again with a fresh sheet of paper.

Option B (requires more adult support)

- Create the colors below with assistance from an adult. There are also many more recipes for making homemade natural food coloring and tie dyes with plant-based dyes to be found online. Apply with paintbrush, fingers, and/or pieces of sponge to paper in your protected work area
 - **Pink:** In a high-speed blender or food processor, mix canned beets with juices until smooth. Strain if desired. Alternatively, if using fresh beets, peel and chop them. Cover them with water in a sauce pan and let simmer for 5 minutes. Transfer the water to recyclable container and save the beets for eating!
 - **Yellow:** In a small saucepan, boil half a cup of water and a teaspoon of ground turmeric, or a few slices of fresh turmeric for 3 to 5 minutes. Let cool and transfer to a recyclable container.
 - **Purple:** In a high-speed blender or food processor, blend frozen blueberries and water together until smooth. Using a fine-mesh sieve, strain the mix into a recyclable container.
 - **Green:** Boil ½ cup of fresh, or frozen spinach in enough water to cover for 5 minutes. Drain cooking water. In a high-speed blender or food processor, blend the spinach and 3 tbsp of water together until smooth. Slowly add more water as needed. Strain and let cool. Transfer to disposable container.
- Place your containers of dye and paper on your protected work area. Using paint brushes or pieces of sponge, experiment painting with your natural dye. Rinse sponges or brushes before using different colors, or use a different tool for each one.

REFLECTION

1. Which materials did you find most satisfying? What worked best to create color for you work? Did you feel you had control over making the marks and how the color appeared? Was there chance or room for more experimentation?
2. What kinds of actions did you use to make these marks? Do the marks reflect or look like traces of these actions?
3. Will you display your food paintings? Try placing them in different locations: do they look different on the refrigerator or a wall than they do when you view them more closely, like when you work with the material on a table or the floor?

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MUSEUM

IMAGE:

Carmen Argote, *Patio con Citrus / Patio with Citrus*, 2019. Cochineal and lemon on watercolor paper, 197 × 116 in (500 × 294 cm). Courtesy the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles

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