

FITCHBURG PRIDE

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The illustration is set against a light blue background. At the top, the title "Food for Thought" is written in a green, cursive font. Below the title are three thought bubbles with green, scalloped edges. The top-left bubble shows a silver potato boat on a green field. The middle bubble shows a green vegetable sculpture with a red tomato in the center and the word "CABBAGE" written below it. The bottom-right bubble shows a bowl of soup with two faces of a man with glasses and a mustache floating in it. In the foreground, a man with dark curly hair, glasses, and a mustache is wearing a dark turtleneck and holding a large silver fork.

Whether it's potatoes and watermelons (top left), cabbage and veggies (middle), or matzoh ball soup (bottom right), food is on the artistic mind of Fitchburg artist Jeff "Jeffu" Warmouth. To find out more about Warmouth, and his exhibit at the DeCordova Museum, please see page 10.

FROM THE FRONT

Food for art's sake

Jeff 'Jeffu' Warmouth creates art both funny and tasty looking

BY KAREN MANN
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When Jeffu is looking to cast his next production, he goes to the produce aisle of the grocery store.

"It's easier to work with vegetables, they don't talk back," said artist Jeff "Jeffu" Warmouth with a smile on his face.

The local artist currently has an exhibit, "Spudnik," on display at the DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park in Lincoln.

While Jeffu, whose pen name comes from the Japanese pronunciation of Jeff, said he couldn't pigeonhole himself into one genre, his work is usually humorous and based in food.

"I wanted to make work that was accessible, that people could understand," said Jeffu, who teaches in the interactive multimedia track at Fitchburg State College.

"In graduate school, things are very abstract and heavy. You need a PhD just to understand," said Ellen Wetmore, Warmouth's wife. The two attended the school of the Museum of Fine Arts together to obtain their Master's degrees.

Jeffu started by using common household objects in his work.

One of his creations was a photo of his bunny chewing on a blue broomstick. Jeffu then switched the bunny and the broom to opposite sides, took another picture, and then put the two together.

"It looked like a Q-tip," said Jeffu.

The switch to using food in his art came from his love for cooking.

"I was so comfortable working

with food for a medium. It is like putting a recipe together," said Jeffu.

After he had been working with food for a while, he moved from photography to film narratives. "Day of the Cabbage" is a Godzilla-style monster movie, while "Il Spaghetti Occidentali" is a western.

When Jeffu created the cookbook, "Strictly Kosher Style," he really learned to mix food and humor.

Jeffu was asked by the professor of a History of Jewish Humor course to be involved in a show the professor was putting together.

"I was a non-Jew, I was invited for that reason. I was the non-Jew looking at Jewish humor," said Jeffu.

He said he did a lot of research on kosher laws so he wasn't poking fun from the outside. He said that he always does research on a topic before using it in a humorous way.

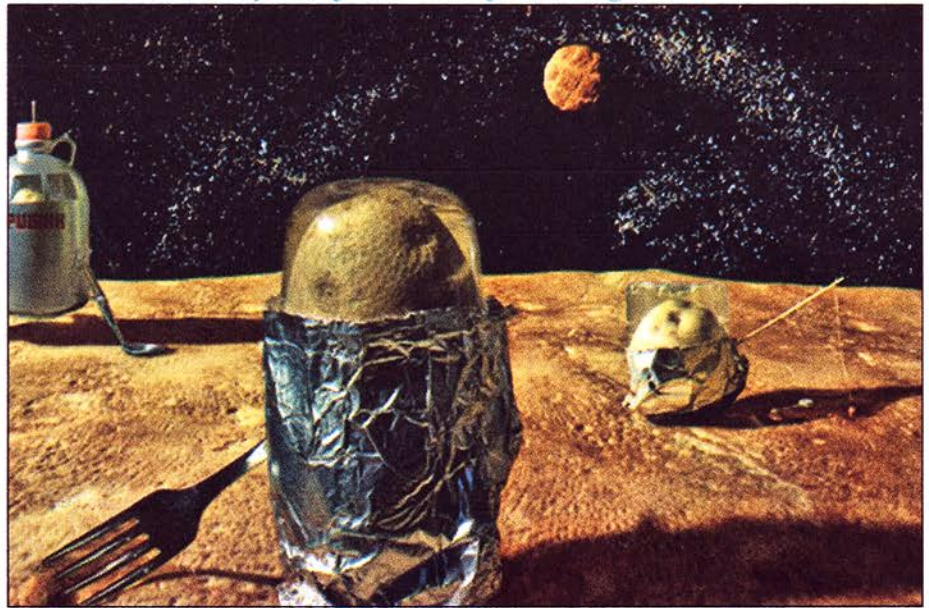
"In Jewish humor, there is a tradition of jokes that play with kosher laws," said Jeffu. The cookbook features items like "Bagel Belly," "Menorah Dogs," and "Legalized Ham."

His current endeavor with food and humor is Spudnik, which he describes as a "sci-fry history of potato space exploration."

A sketch of a potato doing a spacewalk is what inspired him. Once he came up with the name, "Spudnik," he said everything else fell into place.

The exhibit features photos, videos, and some installation work.

"Press this button to hear the actual sound of Spudnik X-1,"



A potato investigates a pancake planet as part of Jeff "Jeffu" Warmouth's exhibit at the DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park.

says audio at one of the stations.

With all of the various things Jeffu has done, there is still something he has yet to do, a collaborative piece with his artist wife.

Ellen is a member of the Boston Sculptors Gallery. She describes herself as a Renaissance artist.

Unlike her husband, she does not focus as much on the art she produces being accessible to people.

"A lot of stuff comes from strange dreams and experiences. It's not so much about, 'Will other people understand.' I just do," said Ellen, who is also a professor, teaching technology and art at UMass-Lowell.

Her art has recently taken on

a new theme of body awareness, due to the fact she had a child nine months ago.

"It is surreal what happens, there is something growing inside of you," said Ellen.

"Split" is a self-portrait sculpture where the body is cut in two at the waist. The torso is on the floor looking up at the legs, which are elevated high above the torso.

"The body and brain are torn between having kids," said Ellen.

Keeping with Ellen's body awareness theme and Jeffu's use of food, the two are now working on a collaboration.

"Land of lactation" will be one station the model train rides through at the DeCordova Museum.

"The train runs through different stations. We were thinking about what a baby sees as his landscape," said Ellen.

The eight-foot by eight-foot display will be made of mountains/breasts that shoot out water/milk, which runs down streams in the mountains.

"We usually will work a little bit on the other person's stuff. This is interesting because neither one of us is in charge," said Jeffu.

The exhibit will run from September through January at the DeCordova. For more information visit <http://jeffu.tv> or www.Ellenwetmore.iwarp.com.