

LEE KRASNER

When Lee Krasner first met Jackson Pollock, she didn't cook. In fact, according to the fictionalised version of their love story (Pollock starring Ed Harris and Marcia Gay Harden), her culinary skills were so limited that on Pollock's first visit to Krasner's studio, she asked her future husband if he would like a cup of coffee and took him to the local cafe saying "You don't think I make it myself, do you?"

The couple met in 1942 when they participated in a group show in New York. At the time, Krasner was a more established artist than Pollock but, recognising the potential of his "drip paintings", she would go on to help make his name as one of the most celebrated painters of the twentieth century. The couple moved to rural East Hampton three years later and, far from any cafes, Krasner had no choice but to make her own coffee. They bought a gas stove and over the years, she learnt to cook and became known for making beautiful meals for friends and collectors. She regularly invited influential people from New York to ensure she stayed connected with the city's art world and to promote Pollock's work.

As an artist, it's not surprising that she was interested in the presentation of her food, but Krasner took this to extremes. If she asked friends to bring a dish to dinner she would tell them exactly how she wanted it; how it should be cooked and served, even which ingredients to use. Her attention to detail was noted by many of her guests as she would make everything she could from scratch, from homemade bread to lobster bisque, one of Pollock's favourites.

Despite not having an interest in cooking when she was younger, Krasner had links to good food and produce from childhood as her parents sold fresh fruit, vegetables and fish at a market stand in Brooklyn. And once they were settled in their new home, she and Pollock established an abundant vegetable garden. The couple were very proud of their home-grown produce and would often give it away to friends and visitors as gifts. Pollock enjoyed fishing in the river nearby and after a particularly successful trip, Krasner celebrated the catch by rubbing the large turpon in ink before pressing it onto a sheet of paper. The print still hangs in the kitchen of their today, which is now a museum and study centre.

Natural forms fascinated Krasner. Moments like this inspired her and as she developed her practice, ingredients began to feature in her work. In her earlier career, she had worked on a relatively small scale, mostly in collage. But after Pollock's death she moved into his studio, which was much larger than her own, where she was able to start working on a bigger scale and shifted her practice to create action based paintings that required greater physical effort. The vast 2 x 5 metre green and pink canvas *The Seasons*, 1957 features a pomegranate, apple and pear which are sensual and bodily in form. Made in the year following her husband's death, the gestural drip marks and brown undertones hint at decay and death, suggesting the cycle of rebirth.

Ultimately, Krasner reduced these shapes down to focus on the true essence of the forms. *Vernal Yellow*, 1980 features rounded shapes in vivid shades of purple and yellow. She's known to have loved the colours of the garden and these shades could easily be inspired by the beetroot she grew there. She also became more and more engrossed by the textural quality of her works and beneath the swipes of paint you can see ripped up pieces of her own paintings and drawings that make up the shape of the composition - a resourcefulness and attention to detail that she applied to all aspects of her life as an artist, a homemaker and a cook.



Lee Krasner, Vernal Yellow, 1980
Oil collage on canvas, 150 x 178 cm
Museum Ludwig, Cologne

ROAST BEETROOT, HALLOUMI AND CHICORY SALAD WITH TAHINI YOGHURT AND POMEGRANATE MOLASSES DRESSINGS

Lee Krasner created a variety of beautiful meals from her home grown produce. She was particularly fond of beetroot and created Beet Pickles and Borscht soup to celebrate their vibrant pink colour. Just like the layered, textural collage Vernal Yellow, 1980, this dish is an explosion of colour and texture, with layer upon layer of flavour. Earthy beetroot, sharp, crisp chicory, sweet butternut squash and salty, chewy halloumi are topped with a creamy tahini dressing and a generous drizzle of fruity pomegranate molasses.

Serve this salad hot or cold, depending on the occasion and time of year - both are equally delicious. I recommend preparing the vegetables and dressing in advance and frying the halloumi at the last minute for an easy but impressive side dish. Follow it up with the Chocolate Brownies recipe (p.X), inspired by the work of Krasner's husband Jackson Pollock, for an Abstract Expressionist-inspired menu.

SERVES 4-6 AS A SIDE

FOR THE SALAD

3 golden beetroots
2 red beetroots
1 small butternut squash
2 tbsp olive oil
1 pinch sea salt flakes
2 heads of red chicory
225g halloumi

FOR THE DRESSINGS

1 tbsp tahini
4 tbsp natural yoghurt
1/2 small lemon, juiced

Heat oven to 180°C/ 160°C Fan.

Place the beetroots whole with their skins on in a deep baking dish. Pour just boiled water from the kettle to come one third of the way up the sides of the beetroot. Bake for 25-30 minutes, or until softened.

Meanwhile, peel the butternut squash. Halve, deseed and cut into 1/2 cm slices across the width. Coat the pieces in olive oil and place them in a single layer on a separate baking tray. Sprinkle with sea salt and roast for 20 minutes or until soft, turning half way.

Rinse the beetroot under cold water to cool and scrape off the skin with a spoon. Slice both colours into half moons 1 cm thick.

To prepare the dressing, whisk together the tahini, yoghurt, lemon juice and a pinch of sea salt in a small bowl until smooth. Add a little cold water to make the dressing just thin enough to pour.

Once the butternut squash has cooked, chop the halloumi into slices 1cm thick.

Heat the remaining tbsp of olive oil in a frying pan on a medium-high heat. Fry the halloumi for 1-2 minutes on each side or until crisp and golden brown. Set aside.

To serve, snap the leaves off the chicory bulbs and arrange on a large, flat serving plate with the two colours of beetroot, butternut squash and halloumi.

Drizzle the dressing over the salad, followed by the pomegranate molasses and serve.



