

Permanent Global Summertime

Ian Harris

More than a year had gone by since Mr. Herbert's visit and the only thing that was known was that the gringos were planning to plant banana trees in the enchanted region that Jose Arcadio Buendia and his men had crossed in search of the route to the great inventions.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, 1967



Around the turn of the twentieth century, gardener and amateur photographer **Charles Henry Jones** (1866–1959) made pictures of the fruit, vegetables and flowers he grew on the estate he managed at Great Ote Hall in Sussex. Having lain undiscovered for decades, Jones's pictures surfaced in the 1980s to such critical acclaim that several examples of his work now reside in the V&A's photography collection. This includes an album in which five of the pages each contains a typological grid of 9 prints of different pear varieties - 45 varieties in all. Although it cannot be certain that all these varieties were grown on the Great Ote estate, the fact that they were available to Jones suggests they were, at the very least, locally-grown.

Today, despite the UK's National Fruit Collection at Brogdale in Kent containing some 550 different varieties of pear, the choice offered by British supermarkets is extremely limited: Most stores offer only two or three varieties - generally Conference, plus one or two others - from a limited list of around eleven or twelve types. So, although British consumers enjoy the supposed benefits of what food writer Joanna Blythman termed 'permanent global summertime', which she defined as ..

... the ability to purchase at the wholesale level certain fruits and vegetables from different parts of the world at different times of the year, thus enabling retailers to offer this produce either year round or for longer periods than their traditional local growing seasons ...

it would seem that the supply chain offer is focused more on factors such as uniformity, reliability, transportability, shelf life, and price than on attributes like taste and variety.

The work itself serves as an homage to Jones's work, juxtaposing digitally-photographed supermarket-sourced fruit with pictures, made using colour film, of ancient espaliered trees still being tended in the walled orchard at Great Ote Hall.

About the artist

Originally from the suburbs of south-east London, Ian Harris is a photographic artist living and working in Somerset.

Based, in part, on an understanding of the world of political economy derived from thirty years of working within the financial markets of the City of London, he works within the tradition of straight photography to explore ideas of landscape perception, use and change as well as to demonstrate and critique the impact of societal choices.



My considerable thanks go to Carola Godman Irvine at Great Ote Hall for her kind support in allowing me access to the gardens and for sustaining me with tea and refreshments while I worked.