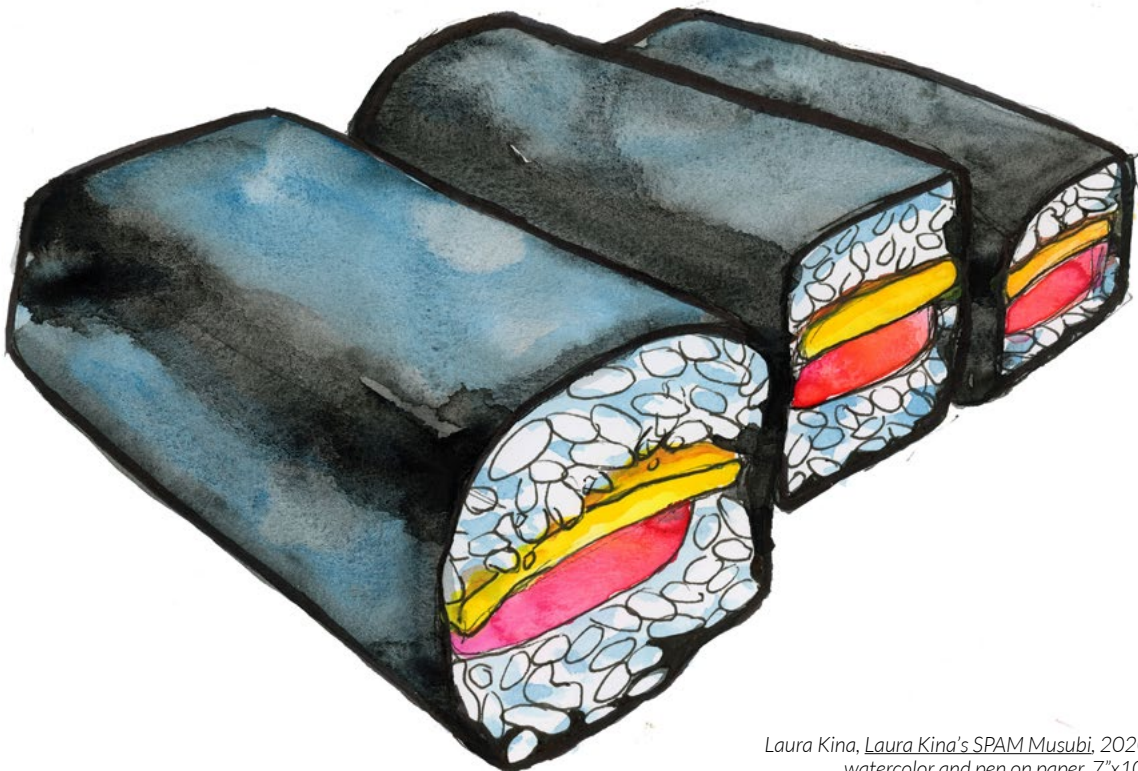


## Laura Kina • Spam Musubi

SPAM became popular in Hawai'i during WWII and they still have the largest per capita consumption of SPAM in the U.S. When I was growing up in the Pacific Northwest in a Norwegian community, my Grandma Kina, who was from a sugarcane plantation on the Big Island of Hawai'i, taught us to enjoy making and eating SPAM sushi\* and it became symbolic of our identities as Uchinanchu (Okinawan diaspora) from Hawai'i. SPAM musubi is also my teenage-kid Midori's favorite food and she has fond memories of making this for big family reunions during our annual summer visits to my parents' house in Poulsbo, WA. During the COVID-19 pandemic in summer 2020, I was diagnosed with stage one breast cancer and Midori often took over for me in the kitchen when I was too sick to cook. This was one of the first dishes she mastered on her own. Between travel restrictions and my compromised immune system, we haven't been able to leave Chicago to see our family on the West Coast so Midori and I look for any excuse to make SPAM musubi. It's our guilty pleasure comfort food that helps us feel connected to family.

\*My grandma's version of SPAM sushi was Okinawan plantation style, which was very similar to Korean kimbap. She made oversized maki sushi rolls, which were seasoned strongly with white vinegar (salt and sugar) and rolled with either SPAM or canned tuna and whatever was around. Think recycling. Later we evolved these to be a mix of the California roll adding in strips of egg, cucumber, avocado, and sugar/soy sauce marinated dried gourd shavings (kampyo) and shitake mushrooms. Today I make the musubi style since it's more convenient.

This recipe was originally published, along with my Auntie Nora's mac salad recipe, in Kiam Marcelo Junio, *Filipino Fusions: A Culinary Critique*. Chicago, IL: Inside the Artist's Kitchen + Kiam Marcelo Junio, 2016, 36–40.



Laura Kina, *Laura Kina's SPAM Musubi*, 2020, watercolor and pen on paper, 7"x10".

# Spam Musubi Recipe

## Ingredients:

- 3 cups Japanese sushi rice
- 4 cups water (or one knuckle level over the rice)
- 1 can SPAM
- seasoned rice vinegar (Marukan brand) to taste
- 4 eggs
- 1/2 teaspoon soy sauce
- 1/2 teaspoon sugar
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- package of sushi nori
- rectangular sushi rice press (or use the empty SPAM can with both top and bottom of can removed).
- *furikake* (Japanese rice seasoning. Wasabi Fumi Furikake is ono!)

## Directions:

1. Rinse the raw rice in cold water until the water is no longer cloudy (approximately 4 times). Put rice in a pot or rice cooker with enough water to cover. Use package or rice cooker instructions or measure the water so that it is one finger knuckle deep. If using a stovetop, soak rice in water for 15 minutes, then bring to a boil; reduce heat to low and simmer, covered, 20 minutes, or until liquid is absorbed. Remove from heat; let stand covered, 10 minutes. Fluff the rice with a rice paddle. Scoop out 2 cups at a time into a glass bowl (don't take it all out or it will get too hard) and season the rice to taste with seasoned rice vinegar. Make sure it's not too wet, but has a slight punch of vinegar.
2. Cut up 1 can of SPAM into 8 slices, approximately 1/4-inch thick. Put 1 tablespoon vegetable oil in a pan. When the pan is hot, fry the SPAM in a pan until light brown on both sides. Set cooked SPAM slices on a paper towel to absorb excess oil.
3. Mix eggs and lightly season with a splash of soy sauce and dash of sugar (optional variation – add a little *dashinomoto*). Put 1 tablespoon of vegetable oil in a pan. When the pan is hot, pour the egg mixture into the pan to form a thin omelet (*tamago*). Let the eggs set up and then carefully flip the omelet. Cook briefly and then slide it onto a plate to cool. Cut into rectangular shapes the same size as your SPAM slices.
4. Cut the sheets of nori in half. Place a sheet of nori on a cutting board. Put the sushi rice press in the middle and begin to assemble the layers of the musubi.
5. Put enough rice at the bottom of the press to make a 1/4-1/2-inch layer of rice. Use the press to gently flatten the rice down. Sprinkle a layer of *furikake* seasoning, add a layer of SPAM, add a layer of egg, and add a final layer of rice. Press to flatten rice and then push the layers through the mold. Fold the nori over the layers. Place musubi seam side down on a plate. The moisture from the hot rice will seal the nori.
6. After all 8 musubis are assembled, you can either eat them whole (a great option for lunches or snacks on the go) or you can cut them in half or in fourths to serve as appetizers sushi-style. Make sure that your knife blade is wet so that the rice won't stick to the blade. Make sure to wipe your knife blade each time. A simple way to do this is to just put water on a paper towel.

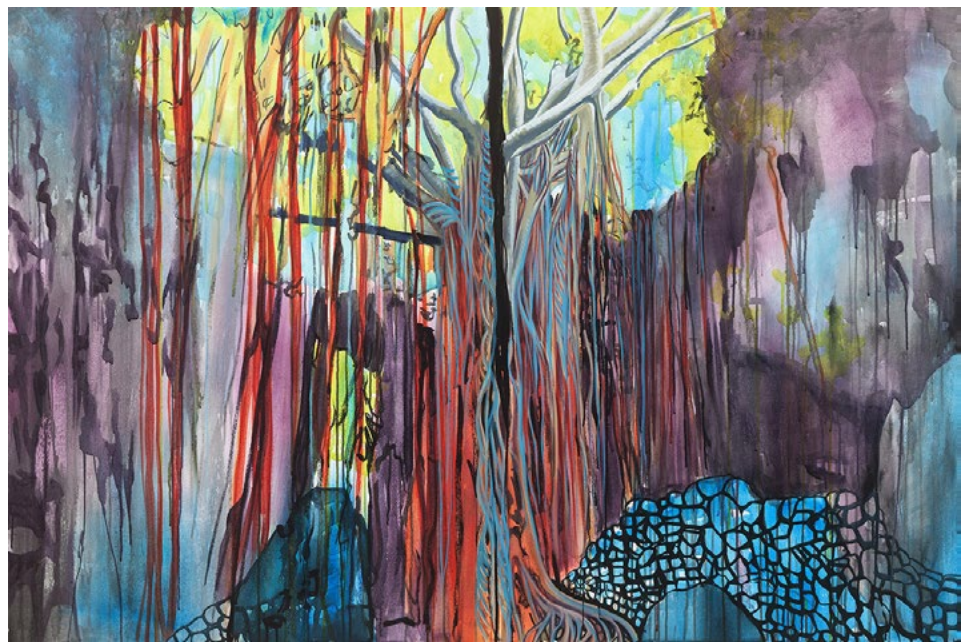
*Variations – marinate the SPAM in teriyaki sauce, omit egg and furikake and substitute a grilled pineapple slice.*

## Laura Kina



Laura Kina is Vincent de Paul Professor The Art School at DePaul University. Contemporary Asian American art; Okinawan, mixed race, and critical ethnic studies; and feminist/queer theory form the nexus of her intersectional art and scholarship. In 2020, she was awarded an ART Matters Foundation fellowship and she is a 2019 Joan Mitchell Foundation Artist-in-Residence awardee. Kina has exhibited at India Habitat Centre and India International Centre, Nehru Art Centre, Okinawa Prefectural Art Museum, Chicago Cultural Center, Japanese American National Museum, Rose Art Museum, Smithsonian Archives of American Art, Spertus Museum, and Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience, amongst others. Kina is co-editor of *Queering Contemporary Asian American Art* (University of Washington Press, 2017) and *War Baby/Love Child: Mixed Race Asian American Art* (University of Washington Press, 2013). In 2019, Bess Press published her trilingual (Pidgin/Japanese/Uchinaaguchi) illustrated children's book *Okinawan Princess: Da Legend of Hajichi Tattoos* written by Lee A. Tonouchi. She serves as a series editor for *Critical Ethnic Studies and Visual Culture* (University of Washington Press).

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Laura Kina, *Ufushu Gajumaru (giant banyan tree), Valley of Gangala, Okinawa, Japan, 2019, acrylic on canvas, 48×72".*