

Eating With Our Eyes

When I was at culinary school and we were boiling meat stock in gigantic pots, something I had never seen or done before, we would chuck in all the leftovers that weren't garbage: vegetable peel, meat, bones, tendons from cleaning a steak, and any other tasty morsels that could add flavor to the ever-simmering pot that would sometimes cook for days. Nothing was wasted, and I really liked that process. Then, when we felt it was done (or when our teacher told us) we strained off whatever was still, surprisingly, solid and began reducing the liquid by boiling it violently, until all that remained was something we called meat glaze. This tasty and complex gelatinous substance was then used in our daily cooking to add flavor to a variety of dishes. A little goes a long way, or a lot becomes very little.

I often compare my artistic practice to making stock; I collect small fragments of ideas and observations that are boiled down, mashed together into a not always that appetising obsession. I never know what will captivate me or sometimes even why. But here I am, with my meat glaze, somewhat disappointed by this jelly-like, brown, umami-smelling idea. Should this really fascinate me, eat my time for what currently seems like an unfathomable future?

To eat art, that sounds remarkable and a bit pretentious, or worse, like a whimsical notion. So, what is it about eating, consuming, that interests me? Somewhere in that quivering and semi-transparent meat glaze the flavors/thoughts lie waiting to invigorate the dish that will be my next exhibition.

Of course, the obvious idea is there, the one that stares us in the face and asks: is this about consuming art? Yes, it is, we reply unthinkingly, and after giving it a bit more thought: no, it isn't, or yes, a little bit. One idea does not suffice, because this is meat glaze we're talking about, it has been simmering for a long time. It's just as much about what inspired me, other artists and their works that have moved me and that my eyes have devoured with pleasure. Yes, we eat with our eyes too, as any TV chef will be happy to tell you. But I think it goes deeper than that, my interest in "eating art". It's probably more about a kind of natural magic, conquering what you see, what moves you. Meeting something with your body.

In his influential book *The Golden Bough*, James G Frazer writes about the two principles of sympathetic magic: "things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other", and "like produces like". Voodoo is an example of the first principle. By appropriating, using something such as hair or nails from a person, you can influence and manipulate their body and inflict pain, but also various kinds of desire, as if by remote control. Or the notion that by eating, say bear, the bear's strength and power is transferred to you, making you mighty as a bear. Like produces like is the notion that what I do in the microcosm will also influence the macrocosm. We can summon rain over the village and its pastures by watering a miniature model of the village. As enlightened beings, we may, of course reject and ridicule this, but we are nevertheless all trying to influence our little model, so that it will open up the greater surroundings to us. Like James G Frazer, we try to persuade ourselves that all is factual and rationalize away our primitive instincts, the child's perspective on the world, filled with amazing things and events. A stick can turn into a sword, and a sword can be a magic wand.

James never even visited the tribes or people he wrote about; he had contacts with missionaries who answered countless questions, but he was never there himself. You don't need to have been there to build castles in the air founded on your own ideas, to find links and to make suppositions, which lead to wild speculation. That's fantastically wonderful, I think. If you're not limited by framework of science, that is, which Sir James G Frazer was, unfortunately. But toying a little bit with an idea never killed anyone. After all, we all live in other people's air castles, so why not build our own?

So, in my little air castle, we eat art. We sit in a fabulous apartment overlooking Central Park, enjoying our host's generosity as s/he takes work after work from the walls and plinths and serves them to us. Picasso is a bit tough, someone says, but Hilma af Klint seems to have aged well in that crate in the attic. A classical sculpture is sliced up, and the bread-like innards are consumed with much chomping and happy smiling. We eat them like they ate others, and we are inspired and make short time travels, suddenly we're in post-war Paris and in its hope that we can solve the problems rationally and sensibly. Before that, we made a detour to a Greco-Roman bacchanalia and tickled our palates with delicious little sculptures, I particularly recall a small, delicate man sprawled lustily on a craggy rock. It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience to taste Marie-Louise Ekman, who herself has taken a huge bite off Baertling; to savor both artists in one painting was a true delight. The only disappointment so far was perhaps the saccharine Damien Hirst we had with our afternoon coffee. Our host promises many exquisite temptations, because s/he has a whole pantry full of thrilling oeuvres. And I surreptitiously undo my top trouser button under the table in preparation for the abundance. Meanwhile, I can feel the host's hungry gaze devouring me.

Each work of art is a small death, someone once wrote, and it certainly feels like that sometimes. It's eat or be eaten, but the death of one organism gives life to another. The little death gives life to the imagination and our view of the world. Perhaps that is one of the things that interests me in this work: giving life and form to thought, no matter how absurd. Once the works have materialized, I can engage with them, and in that engagement the idea becomes more lucid to me.

– Thomas Broomé