

# Setting the Table

An exhibition curated by  
Manon Tourigny

April 19 to June 23, 2024

# Ephemeral Art or Edible Works...

We often define gastronomy with art-related qualifiers, despite the fact that most chefs would call themselves artisans rather than artists.

I've always known that I have this inner restlessness, but would wanting to be an artist make me an imposter in that milieu?

Thankfully for me, my process and questioning were fairly simple...

The big question was mainly the following: where is the link between artist and chef and at what level do they merge?

How would I find out what would define me in this huge void...

After several attempts, both good and bad, I finally found my calling...

The answer had been under my nose for a long time, in fact it was there since childhood.

As a child of the *Refus global*, my own manifesto would be called the *repu global*, or Total Repleteness...

Inspired by the beauty of the gesture and abstraction, I delved into my trade.

Greatly influenced by the Automatiste movement, by its unique vision of art and its place in society, the relationships between my cooking and this ideology came together quite naturally.

By seeing flavour as colour, I created my own kind of canvas. Of course, my pieces were nothing compared to those of Mousseau, Borduas, or Riopelle, but I like to think that they brought forth similar emotions...

Speaking of emotions, art's ultimate goal is to make people feel as much as possible, while the ultimate goal of cooking is to feed, to make food for others...

EAT

Verb

1. put (food) into the mouth and chew and swallow it.

Ex.: Eat bread

2. to feed oneself, to take food

Ex.: She refuses to eat.

This dictionary definition, which is far too simplistic in my opinion, is an awkward summation of the most grounded activity of our everyday life.

Allow me to redefine it...

Eating is a first encounter, a first love...

Eating is laughing, crying...

Eating is sharing, exchanging, changing...

Eating is discovering ourselves, but also, especially, others...

Eating is losing and finding ourselves again...

Eating is pleasant, or not; life isn't always great...

Eating is what brings us together, defines us, and unites us...

Eating is life...

Eating is art...

Eating is the art of living...

— Mousso

Translated from the French by Jo-Anne Balcaen

# Setting the Table

*No restaurants. The means of consoling oneself: reading cookbooks.*

— Charles Baudelaire

Several years ago, my aunt Denise had the idea of putting together a family cookbook. She kept the project on the backburner but would bring it up at each of our gatherings. A few months after she died in 2018, my aunt Claire took over the project. I suggested we include anecdotes—stories behind the recipes or about our love of food. Through our combined efforts we gathered over 200 recipes.<sup>1</sup> They now all live in a cloud, organized under the usual cookbook categories. We never did complete the project; my aunt Claire died in May 2023. But I take comfort in knowing that we had time to select and re-transcribe our family's classic recipes. For me, this was vital and represents part of our family's heritage that could have been lost forever.

In this spirit of transferring knowledge, I decided to examine the idea of food, while acknowledging that it's a common art historical subject. Although its treatment differs from one century to the next according to evolving artistic practices, food has often taken centre stage: as part of still life compositions since Antiquity, as reproductions of everyday food items as seen in Pop Art, with performance artists who use food as raw material or transactional objects, and with other artists who use it to draw or to create an installation.<sup>2</sup> To my great astonishment, Artexte's collection includes a number of recipe books, which convinced me to make this subject my main area of focus. As we all know, recipe books have been tremendously popular in Québec, Canada, and around the world for decades, and chefs, cooks, and celebrities flood the book market with their own cookbooks.

1 The work was done by a committee comprised of my aunts Louise and Claire, my uncle Pierre, my cousin Marie-Claude, and myself, with the help of Mado and Louise B.

2 While conducting research in e-artexte, I discovered the work of Susan Shantz. Her piece titled *Satiare* is composed of objects cast in tomato paste.

Newspapers and magazines even review them and create annual lists for the “Best Cookbooks of the Year.”

Food, recipes, and all things culinary remain relevant to the art world today. DARE-DARE’s kitsch buffet fundraiser helped bring together a community of people who gravitate around the centre.<sup>3</sup> The event was a chance to enjoy dishes from another era, like the sandwich loaf, or my grandmother’s tomato aspic, the recipe for which is included in this booklet. Recently, La Centrale welcomed the Intervals Collective and their project *Around the Table*, which is centered on sharing experiences with the public to explore “food-related issues in an inclusive and decolonial manner.”<sup>4</sup> As part of Nuit blanche, people were encouraged to tell stories about, among other things, their lost recipes.<sup>5</sup> These recent projects demonstrate a collective need to share family stories, childhood memories, forgotten skills, flavours that bring us closer to our culture, or unforgettable moments. In keeping with this, recipe books are clues to the evolution of society’s culinary customs. As a collector of all things popular culture, Marc-Antoine K. Phaneuf became interested in recipe books with cover designs that typify the look of a certain era, whether through the book’s main theme or its design. His work titled *Vieux buffet*<sup>6</sup> (2011–2024) is a dense, all-over composition of 300 cookbook covers. A cartography that locates a moment in time in the history of cookbook recipes: for microwaves, brunch, blenders, cheese, diets, Italian food, Chinese food, and countless others. As Michel Lambert notes, “for over a hundred years, popular cookbooks have reflected our culinary culture, our collective food preferences, and the tastes of the vast majority. They are the most reliable witnesses of the evolution of our cuisine.”<sup>7</sup> Phaneuf’s piece provides an eloquent summary of this.

3 DARE-DARE TOUSKI was held in December 2023.

4 Quote from the project page. The project took place in February and will return to La Centrale in May 2024. <<https://bit.ly/43UZ9pO>>

5 An immersive experience that aimed to present lost culinary memories (family recipes or restaurants that have closed). Presented at the Monument-National by the Centre en arts et innovation sociale, under the evocative title *The Lost Food Table*.

6 This is the installation’s fourth iteration.

7 “Plongée dans l’histoire de nos livres de recettes,” *Le Devoir*, Cahier Plaisirs, October 22, 2022. [Our translation]

I must admit that I share Phaneuf's obsession with cook-books, both vintage and new.<sup>8</sup> A few examples are on display in the vitrine of my personal archives. You'll also find a menu from *Aux sept bonheurs*, the restaurant formerly owned and operated by Karen Tam's parents. I still remember their Chicken Soo-Guy, and wish I had the recipe for it! For this exhibition, I invited Tam to present *Chef Lee's Wok'n'Roll Garden* (2004–2010), a series of "Chinese" symbols cut out of red paper. Far from being truly representative of Chinese culture, these images were used to attract a Western clientele who could easily draw links between Chinese food and the Buddha, pagodas, koi, junks (ships), etc. For most Quebecers, our introduction to another culture, whether Chinese or from somewhere else, came from—and still comes from—its restaurants.

Reproducing a recipe stems from the desire to transmit culinary knowledge through writing, as we are reminded in Pierre Ayot's piece *La cuisine de Bocuse* (1986). Here, a more elitist culture, reflected in the figure of the "pope of French gastronomy," collides with stacks of books and canned foods. Ayot's work often integrated food-related items, like his many silk-screened prints of chip bags, a toaster with its toast, a soft case of O'Keefe beer, or the collective artists' book *Graff Dinner*, on view here. Published in 1978 and assembled inside a pie box, it features twenty seven recipes from Québec and elsewhere, some of which are quite humorous.

Some documents from the collection were selected for their interesting content around different approaches to food<sup>9</sup>, or for their graphic design.<sup>10</sup> In some cases, artists distributed recipes based on a single ingredient (bananas for Anna Banana; beans for Alison Knowles) or used a food ingredient to create a publication. For example, Kraft Dinner cheese powder on the cover of *De l'air féministe moderne à Tina*, a zine by Les Sabines, or sliced bread for Folie/Culture's issue no. 6 on the theme of instability.

8 An obsession I inherited from my mother and that I shamelessly perpetuate.

9 The ORANGE event in Saint-Hyacinthe is one example.

10 For instance, an exhibition booklet designed as a restaurant menu.

*Hungry Zine* is a community-focused series that centres alternative stories, art, and culture around food. It highlights the importance of giving a voice to BIPOC communities that are missing from traditional food media.<sup>11</sup> Each issue focuses on a specific theme, and artists, writers, and creators are invited to submit proposals.<sup>12</sup> Other artists have worked together on an instruction manual (performance recipes), while others have published actual recipe books since the pandemic. L. Sasha Gora explains:

*More than a genre, cookery books are an artistic medium. There are titles penned by artists who work with food in their practices, but also by those who don't. That so many of these titles are collaborative efforts reveals that cooking—whether as art, sustenance, or both—is never a solo endeavour. Artist cookbooks are worth considering at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic is forcing gatherings to distance and diversify.*<sup>13</sup>

*Re-enactment Recipes, The Artist Cookbook: Vol. 2* by Carrie Perreault, and *Souper spaghetti*<sup>14</sup> are recipe books that came together during the pandemic (2021). These initiatives were aimed at assembling a community of artists around a common project during a period of uncertainty and constraint. Each book allows readers to reconnect with the kind of pleasure that eating food can bring, whether cooked by oneself or by loved ones. It's also a tangible way of caring for others.

Food is essential, it keeps us alive, it regulates our schedules, and acts as a social and cultural bond. It's an important vector of communication that allows us to recognize, to know, and to enter into a relationship with other cultures. *Setting the Table* centres on sharing, hospitality,

11 Founded in 2021 and published in Edmonton.

12 Previous issues have looked at, among other subjects, home cooking, canning, restaurants, funeral foods, and mall food.

13 "Cooking the Books: Recipes by Artists," *C Magazine*, October 2020, p. 45.

14 As part of DARE-DARE's *Duologie* project, Amber Berson and I invited artists to publish their family recipes in the interest of community sharing.

comfort, memories, pleasure, matter, and the transferring of knowledge. It's my way of introducing myself to you as the Director of Artexte and to present what I want to focus on for the next few years, but most importantly, to share it with you now in a spirit of openness.

— Manon Tourigny

Translated from the French by Jo-Anne Balcaen



# Gemma Tomato Aspic



## Ingredients

2 cups tomato or vegetable juice  
½ cup celery, finely chopped  
1 tsp. Worcestershire sauce (optional)  
1 tsp. shallots or onions, minced  
Salt and pepper  
2 envelopes unflavoured gelatin  
½ cup cold water

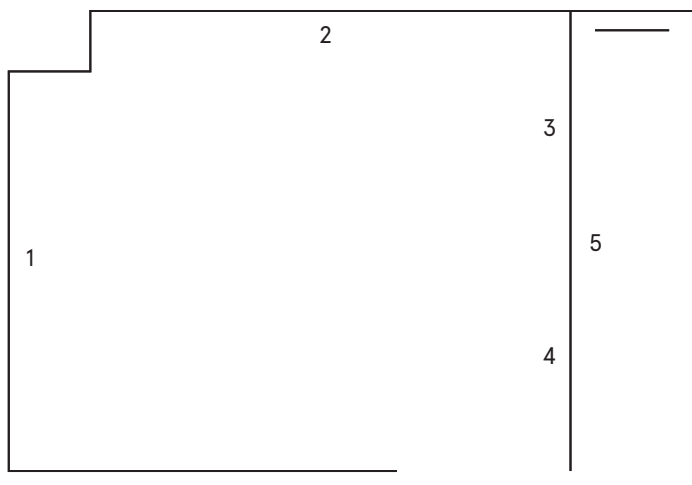
## Directions

Soak gelatin sheets in cold water for 10 minutes. In a saucepan, bring the tomato or vegetable juice to a boil along with the other ingredients. Add seasoning. Remove saucepan from heat, add gelatin and allow to dissolve while stirring (about 2 minutes). Pour mixture into an aspic mold or small individual molds lightly coated with cooking spray. Refrigerate.

## Note from Manon

My grandmother used to make this recipe every year for the holidays. Her red aspic would take centre stage on the table, surrounded by crustless sandwiches, devilled eggs, coleslaw and macaroni salads, and many other dishes. My mother would make it several times a year and would add sliced pimento stuffed Manzanilla olives (same quantity as the celery).

You should try it, it's pretty good!



**1. Vieux Buffet**

Marc-Antoine K. Phaneuf  
2011 - 2024  
Vintage cookbooks and nails  
Various dimensions

**5. Private collection**

Manon Tourigny  
Various mediums and dimensions

**2. Chef Lee's First Wok'n'Roll  
Garden Series**

Karen Tam  
2004 - 2010  
Fabriano Tiziano Paper  
Various dimensions

**3. La cuisine de Bocuse**

Pierre Ayot  
1986  
Silkscreen, acrylic,  
xerography, wood  
130 x 33 x 5 cm

**4. Graff Dinner**

Collective of 27 artists  
1978  
Original prints on Arches paper  
(silkscreen, etching, lithograph,  
engraved wood, photography;  
Box: silkscreen/pie box  
23 x 23 x 4 cm

# Biographies

**Manon Tourigny** was born, lives and works in Tiohtià:ke/Mooniyang/Montréal. She holds a master's degree in arts studies from UQAM, and is a curator and author. She is interested in video art, photography, performance and artistic practices that take place in public space. She has written numerous articles for specialized magazines (*Ciné bulles*, *CV photo*, *Esse arts + opinions*, *Vies des arts*, *Espace et Inter*), in addition to writing exhibition texts for various organizations (artist-run centers, exhibitions centers and museums). For more than 20 years, she has been involved in the visual arts community, notably with VIVA! art action, DARE-DARE, the RCAAQ and Centre CLARK as co-general and artistic director. She is a member of the Regroupement de pairs des arts indépendants de recherche et d'expérimentation (REPAIRE). In 2024, she will be unveiling a storybook illustrated by Fanny Mesnard, which adopts an ecofeminist perspective and questions the ways in which we occupy the land.

Canadian multidisciplinary artist **Pierre Ayot** was born in 1943 and died in 1995. He played a significant part in opening the boundaries between modes of representation by bridging photography, printmaking, video, painting, and sculpture, thereby developing a unique and unclassifiable visual language. His work has been the subject of more than thirty solo exhibitions, and is included in most major public, private, and corporate art collections in Canada, as well as a few internationally. His most major exhibitions were held in 1980 at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, in 1992 at the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec (*Pierre Ayot et son Museum Circus*), in 2001 at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (*Pierre Ayot Unlimited*), and in 2016 as part of a major retrospective (*Pierre Ayot – Regard critique / Critical Insight*) curated by Nicolas Mavrikakis and presented in five venues across Montréal. His work is part of *The Pop of Life!* exhibition on view at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts until July 2024. The Prix Pierre-Ayot, created in his memory by the Ville de Montréal and the AGAC, is awarded annually in recognition of the work of outstanding emerging artists.

**Marc-Antoine K. Phaneuf** is an artist, writer, and curator who studied art history at the Université du Québec à Montréal. His works represent collections, inventories, and classifications that examine popular culture, along with official and fringe contemporary narratives. Phaneuf has exhibited in many artist-run centres, galleries, and museums in Canada, including the Musée régional de Rimouski (2013); Optica, centre d'art contemporain (2015); Museum London (2015); the Grande Bibliothèque (2018); and the National Gallery of Canada (2023). The author of several literary works, such as *Cavalcade en cyclorama* (Le Quartanier, 2013), *Carousel encyclopédique des grandes vérités de la vie moderne* (La Peuplade, 2020), and *Mauvaises herbes* (Le Laps, 2023), he has also published numerous artist books, including *Hockeyeurs* (Musée ambulant, 2021). On stage, he has presented his narrated slide show *Fins périples dans les vaisseaux du manège global* (since 2015) throughout Québec and in France. Based in Québec City, he mostly follows recipes from the *New York Times Cooking* app, and has long considered getting a tattoo of a meat cooking temperature chart on his left forearm.

**Karen Tam 譚嘉文** is a Tiohtià:ke/Montréal-based artist whose research and installation work focus on the constructions and imaginations of cultures, communities, and sites of cultural encounters. Since 2000, she has exhibited her work and participated in residencies in North America, Europe, and China, including the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, the Irish Museum of Modern Art, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Frankfurter Kunstverein, and the He Xiangning Art Museum. Tam was the winner of the 2021 Giverny Capital Prize awarded by the Fondation Giverny pour l'art contemporain. She holds a PhD in Cultural Studies from Goldsmiths (University of London) and an MFA in Sculpture from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She is the Adjunct Curator at Griffin Art Projects and is represented by Galerie Hugues Charbonneau.

# Acknowledgements

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I am grateful to artists Karen Tam and Marc-Antoine K. Phaneuf for having accepted my invitation to present important works that bring so much to my vision of food. Warm thanks go to Madeleine Forcier who graciously agreed to lend me Pierre Ayot's piece and Graff Dinner, which I consider to be a one-of-a-kind artist book.

Giving voice to a chef who knows how to blend cooking and art was a priority for me. It didn't take long to find the ideal person to write the foreword for this booklet, and Antonin Mousseau graciously said yes. What a gift! I am truly thankful to him and to Joséphine Rivard for having put us in touch.

Of course, a whole community of people share my love of food. There's Didier Morelli, whose recent exhibition project preceded mine. We noticed that some of the artists we'd selected were interested in both sports and food. I'll never forget the buffet you put together at the magazine launch for *Le Sigh*. You dared to play on my playground! There are the artists and curators with whom I've explored this subject in the past, including Nadège Grebmeier Forget and her sweet presence at VIVA! art action and at DARE-DARE's *Odyssée*; Nicole Fournier and her *Live dining* performance, which, along with Douglas Scholes work, wrapped up *Verticale's De fond en comble* series; and my collaboration with Denis Lessard that included recipe swapping and the book *Le beau côté des choses*.

And finally, I would like to acknowledge the members of my family who passed on their love of cooking, who helped me experience the joy of family gatherings around generous buffets, and who stimulated my mind and my appetite. I remember my grandmother's roast beef with tea sauce, my dad's French toast with bananas flambé, the classic recipes my mom and I used to cook together, the five-course dinners and hand-made chocolates my godmother would make, my uncle Simon's spaghetti sauce and onion rings, my aunt Denise's fish and chips, and my aunt Claire's hearty Halloween dinners. When I cook each of your specialties, I think of you.

Artex te supports artists, researchers and curators in a collective effort that involves our entire team, including contractual collaborators who participate in the success of each project. In alphabetical order:

Collaborators: Jo-Anne Balcaen (copy-editing and translation), Paul Litherland (photo documentation), Mark Lowe (exhibition technician), and Marie-France Thibault (copy-editing and translation).

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