

To Eat, Perchance to Dream

Eating with Baltz



The sensual aspect to experiencing food is inherent in our humanity. How we choose to interpret and enjoy this connection is very much up to us as individuals. Perhaps the only time in the West in which people did not appreciate this relationship (read: became anaesthetised), or at least exploit the pleasures thereof, is the current one, or rather, the one that spanned from just after WWII to quite recently. Like all waves that permeate our existence, the one of convenience foods, which generated the numbness, is finally on its way down. DAMN° discusses the ins and outs of eating with Emily Baltz.

LYLE REXER / IMAGES EMILIE BALTZ

Emily Baltz wants to design your life, or at least the part of it that goes into your stomach, as well as what happens while it's getting there. She is a food designer whose profession extends from organising 'discourse dinners' to designing food banks that record people's memories of eating. The recently published L.O.V.E. FOODBOOK, which she designed, photographed, and co-wrote, uses recipes to get people talking about love. It won the best first cookbook award at the most recent Prix Gourmand in Paris.

DAMN°: How did you come to do this project?

Emily Baltz: My background is in screenwriting, modern dance, and industrial design, but basically I've been trained in storytelling through multiple dimensions: from the page to the object to the human body. I've worked in this capacity for the last 13 years, through multiple industries and mediums. A few years ago I was approached by the Museum of Sex in New York City to develop an aphrodisiac exhibition. After months of research, what was intended to be

contained in a gallery quickly took on greater proportions, becoming a full fledged bar project (opening in October). My curatorial rôle changed context, from white walls to bar countertops, as we embarked on developing one of the first curatorially-led commercial food & beverage establishments.

Throughout this process, I became keenly aware that the stories being told about aphrodisiacs were archaic, dating back to the Romans, Greeks, and Aztecs. I decided to retell the story in contemporary language, and asked 15 chefs and mixologists from different parts of the world to create their definitions of love in the form of recipes. This compilation became the L.O.V.E. FOODBOOK. Each recipe in the book is accompanied by a short text, explaining the story behind the dish. I travelled to each of the restaurants, photographed the chefs, their dishes, and their process. With my editor, Carole-Anne Boisseau, I also designed and wrote the book. For this freedom and control I am eternally grateful to our publisher, Hervé Chopin.



A SKETCH
A drawing Emilie Baltz made
while answering the DAMN°
questions about cycles of tasting

LICK HEADSHOT
© Emilie Baltz



1

WET ON WET (1)
Top view of Martim Ake Smith-Mattsson's evocative cocktail

PORNOGRAPHY (2)
Gesture drawing for the molé dish by Robert Truitt of Alta Marea Restaurant Group Worldwide

ROMEO & JULIETTE (3/4)
Pigeons, process, ingredients, and the completed dish, by Kobe Desramaults of In De Wulf Restaurant, Belgium



4



DAMN°: Which of the narratives was the most surprising?

EB: One of my favourites is the Romeo and Juliette dish by Kobe Desramault (of In De Wulf, in Belgium). It is made by stuffing a pigeon with hay, letting it ferment for weeks, then cooking it in hay butter. His inspiration came from growing up on a farm. His two best friends were pigeons, and he took care of them every day. One day his mother came to him and said, "Kobe, we have to kill the pigeons." / "Why?" he asked / "Because we have to eat." Kobe's first experience with love is sacrifice, and to this day the dish he prepares is a bittersweet, delicious, nearly wistful ode to his memory.

3

DAMN°: L.O.V.E.? Why not just plain 'love'?

EB: 'Love' is purposefully deconstructed into l.o.v.e. to suggest that it is made of many parts, not just of one ingredient. With this art cookbook, the physical object is designed to be a tactile experience. The cover is coated in sugar and lightly padded, so it provokes a fleshy, stimulating feeling.

DAMN°: We know that many stories surrounding the power of certain foods are merely legends. What are some of the most commonly held notions and why are they so persistent?

EB: Stories around foodstuffs evolve from feelings. Foods that were considered 'magical' or 'powerful' in myth often deliver some sort of physical stimulation, be it the heat from a spice or the energy from sugars. And when we look at the origins of most myths, they are from periods of history when the majority of society was malnourished or underfed. Imagine eating a bit of chocolate for the first time, an exotic creation packed with fats and sugars, when most of your diet is gruel. It feels like a drug – energy surges, endorphins rise, and emotions peak. Very quickly, a story must be imagined in order to make sense of this strange new world.

DAMN°: Throughout the book you emphasise storytelling in relation to food. Aren't the words we use to describe food often more exciting than the thing itself? This is another way of asking whether there is food without words.

EB: I am not a semiotician, but in my own definition, I feel that language is experienced from the outside-in, while food is from the inside-out. We use both of these mediums to communicate, but whether taste exists without language is really the more interesting question. Food exists in biology, while taste is a fabrication of perception. Language offers taste a means of existing in the world. Words are used to express what we feel, but they are also used to fabricate feelings.



2

DAMN°: Obviously, the connection between eating and sex, or eating and desire, has to do with a whole host of physical/psychic overlaps. How do you avoid slipping into a reductive Freudianism when describing this relation? Are thinkers like Deleuze and Serres helpful?

EB: Food is one of the most subjective, emotional materials we have access to, and, similar to sex, it elicits vastly different responses through intimate consumption. I should add that certain foods trigger the Law of Semblance: We like what looks like stuff we like. The oyster is a classic example. Not only does it look like female genitalia, but it also sounds like it, smells like it, and even feels like it.



2

I am French and American, so inherently, there is a constant battle within me between reduction and nuance. I am often inspired by Deleuze's metaphor of organising metaphysical flux as melody: the constant shifting and tuning that occurs in his vision of life is closer to my practice than any Freudian definition. The questions I ask myself are not "What is it?" but "How does it work? And why?" It is the space [between definitions] that is the most interesting – the route from hand to mouth, as I call it – that leaves room for suggestion, intrigue, and individuality.

DAMN°: Why all the interest now in food as a specific cultural subject?

EB: In a time of dehumanised communication and mechanised creativity, food and cooking allow us to use our bodies to create immediate, tangible, sensory outputs. Food is a direct physical link between emotion and body, a metaphor for our physical/virtual lives. Food is also one of the most potent means of information delivery. Since it stimulates all of our senses when used to transmit content-other-than-calories, it has the capacity to facilitate involvement. For this reason I believe it is being exploited across many industries to create a more profound engagement with consumers.



1

OYSTERS AND SEAWEED (1)
Ingredients of a dish by Kobe Desramaults of In De Wulf Restaurant, Belgium

SEXPLOSION (2)
Gesture drawing by Ben Roche, pastry chef at Moto Restaurant, Chicago, and inventor of this fantastical dessert

L.O.V.E. FOODBOOK (3)
Uncropped cover image

3



1

DAMN°: Where are contemporary tastes (in the West) headed? Are there deeper patterns in our relationship to food that are changing?

EB: Contemporary tastes are headed toward home. It is the inverse of what happened in post-WWII America, when the surplus of industrialised foods developed for military rationing found their way to home consumers. A new lifestyle of convenience and speed spawned an entire industry of pre-packaged foods, driving the production out of the home kitchen and into the 'kitchens' of brand-name manufacturers.

The backlash against this industry is being felt today, but as children of both the industrialised food age and the technological revolution, we remain consumers of convenience in the West. Yet we have the opportunity to create smarter, more efficient ways of accessing information and education around food-stuffs that can help even the smallest of kitchens make better choices. Smart home-food and home cooking is the next wave, in which the means of production are on a human scale, but access to information is global.

DAMN°: Curated menus and immersive food experiences – is this the essence of food as an object of desire, or one more step toward a total commodification of the senses?

EB: I think it is problematic to assign a positive/negative judgment to this question. We are in an era of sensory commodification, which is what the food designer is charged with exploring. The senses are our next frontier in an oversaturated marketplace. What my work does is to make me, first and foremost, a more aware human. Through it, I am forced to deal with people, negotiate, empathise, dream, criticise, analyse, and make choices. This is the place where practice and profession come together and actually form life. <



DÉSIRE BRULANT (1)
Gesture drawing of the dessert
by Claire Heitzler of Lasserre,
Paris

WET ON WET (2)
Gesture drawing of the
cocktail by Martim Ake



love-foodbook.com / museumofsex.com / emiliebaltz.com

Rojo; Spanish design on stage; stage by Arquitectura-G Exhibition on tour; Follow us at; #rojoshow & rojoshow.com

- ANDREUWORLD
- BD BARCELONA DESIGN
- CÁRMENES
- COSENTINO
- EQUIPO DRT
- ESTILUZ
- EXPORMIM
- GASTÓN Y DANIELA
- INDESIGN
- JOQUER
- KRISKADECOR
- LLADRÓ
- LZF-LAMPS
- ENERGIA NATURAL
- MARSET
- MOBLES114
- TREKU
- NANIMARQUINA
- ONDARRETA
- DELICA
- MADE DESIGN
- DD-RESOL
- SANCAL
- SANTA&COLE
- TEIXIDORS
- MYORUGA
- VIBIA

Sala Vinçon



Red REUNIÓN
EMPRESAS
DE DISEÑO

rojoshow.com