

# RYAN LEE

RYAN LEE GALLERY LLC  
515 WEST 26TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
212 397 0742  
RYANLEEGALLERY.COM

*FOOD SEX ART the Starving Artists' Cookbook*

July 11 – August 10, 2018

Reception: Wednesday, July 11, 6-8pm

*“LM: You don't consider Fluxus art?”*

*GM: I... no. I think it's good inventive gags. That's what we're doing. And there's no reason why a gag, some people, if they want to call it art, fine, you know. Like I think of gags of Buster Keaton are really a high art form, you know, heh, heh, sight gags... Because we've never intended (it) to be high art.”<sup>1</sup>*

*“We have joined art to life. After the long isolation of artists, we have loudly summoned life and life has invaded art, it is time for art to invade life. The painting of our faces is the beginning of the invasion. That is why our hearts are beating so.”*

*“Why We Paint Ourselves: A Futurist Manifesto”,  
1913, Mikhail Larionov and Illya Zdanevich.<sup>2</sup>*

*“About nine years ago [1961], in Copenhagen, I bought some foodstuffs at random, stamped them “attention work of art” and resold them at shop prices through a gallery. If I could have foreseen the future I would have planned the operation on a longer-term basis. But only later did I realize fully how important EAT ART theme was to become for me.”*

*Daniel Spoerri recalling the origins of EAT ART.<sup>3</sup>*

Food art is art that doesn't seem to be art. It is art through non-art means. In this context we would like to place “The Starving Artists' Cookbook” in a historical avant-garde dialectic, a continuum going back eighty years to the beginning of this century and the origins of a conscious avant-garde. The inchoation of this avant-garde stemmed from artists' realization of an art not bound to traditional definitions or strictures, an art that could encompass all aspects of life. These artists wished to be freed from the estheticism of the objet d'art by advancing the ideas behind their art through direct interaction/participation of the art audience. This then became an art that challenged the status quo by alchemizing everyday objects and events into an “art” and at the same time “non-art” status.

It is a current art world observation that “avant-garde-ism” no longer exists. Post-Modernism has taken Modernist Formalism to the second hand store and dumped it there to sell to the highest bidders (it is said). In effect, Post-Modernism has taken all meaning and spirituality out of “art” and transformed it into a commodity. We would suggest that it is not artists that have robbed “art” of a new creative expression but the art institutions (galleries, museums, schools) that exist through the codification, objectification and the estheticism of art by relegating “art”, that is outside the formalist aesthetic “master system”, to a second class status.

There is and probably always will be an avant-garde which remains for the most part outside the accepted typologies set in place by art institutions. This art is not about esthetics per se, but has everything to do with conceptual expression and thought, vis-a-vis the ways in which art can exist by extension in life. This is true avant-garde art.

# RYAN LEE

RYAN LEE GALLERY LLC  
515 WEST 26TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
212 397 0742  
RYANLEEGALLERY.COM

In the search for examples of “food art” by the early avant-garde, we ran across the work of Russian artist Mikhail Larionov and his “Rayonist Cooking Manifesto” 1912-13 as well as his illusionistic dinners that included soup of wine, figures of animals, birds and plants made from bread.<sup>4</sup> It is perhaps appropriate that this work comes out of a period where the art revolution was concurrent with the political revolution in Russia. Radical art of pre-revolutionary Russia was evidence of a broad discontent with life as it was, society on the verge of a break down. This was soon to be evident in the rest of Europe with the approach of W.W. I. The art international fore-shadowed these societal changes. It seemed to some artists that making, at such a time, respectable paintings and sculpture for the bourgeoisie was absurd.

Rayonism and Constructivism in Russia, Futurism in Italy, German Expressionism, Dada, Bauhaus, and, later, Duchamp’s readymades in America were all art activities expressing contemporary aspects of life through art. In these movements the conception behind the art was sometimes more important than the object itself. In fact, the object was often used as an instigation for an art-life response and of no intrinsic importance of itself. An example of this is the impact of Marcel Duchamp’s “Fountain”, a urinal, entered in the 1917 Armory Show signed R. MUTT, rejected and then misplaced. Today it is represented only by a photograph.

Food art in this context also ties into the late 19th century “myth” (which started earlier in the century) of the starving artist, represented most manifestly by the “drop-out bohemian” lives of Van Gogh and Gauguin. This romantic idea of the artist who disavows his bourgeois life for the sake of art (whether it is true or not) becomes an image almost more powerful than the art they produced. The performance of their lives in the pursuit of art became recognized as a cultural signifier.

Paris at the turn of the century through the 30’s, in most minds, represents the pinnacle of an artistic community. This was art as life in it’s [sic] most naïve state. The artists were not literally “starving”, but were living cheaply and extolling food, sex and art by “café hopping”, performing and producing, all on the same level of intensity and radical intent in a conscience challenge to society. In this context, Gertrude Stein subtitled her 1914 book “Tender Buttons”; “Objects, Food, Rooms”. The objet d’art oftentimes being a pretext for life, and life becoming a work of art by placing itself in the mind of the larger society.

In 1930, Marinetti, a poet, painter and one of the originators of The Futurist movement, printed “The Futurist Cookbook” with the intent of fully involving the individual in the most intimate and necessary function of life and “raising” it to the level of art. To do so by making aware all the senses, not just the visual and cerebral. On one hand, the book “poses” itself as a scientific, sociological manual on the evils of conventional cooking and food consumption in Italy. It bans the use of pasta and heavy multi-course bourgeois meals and promotes rice, small bite-size dishes, and modern industrial cooking equipment. At the same time it contains poetic, sensual, outrageous and totally original recipes and anecdotes in collaboration with other artists and writers of the movement. Marinetti’s contention is that like art and literature, food also must conform to the Futurist philosophy and leave behind traditionalist forms. Perhaps, in trying to intensify and be involved in all aspects of modern existence, the Futurists are an example of the dangers of connecting art and life too adamantly. One of his dinners, “The Extremist Banquet”, performed in a building expressly built for the dinner, consisted only of various smells, poetry

# RYAN LEE

RYAN LEE GALLERY LLC  
515 WEST 26TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
212 397 0742  
RYANLEEGALLERY.COM

reading and food sculpture (not to be eaten). The dinner ends with the suggestion that the guests starve to death. The transcendent poetic aspects of the book are embodied in “The Dinner that Stopped a Suicide” where Marinetti relates the story of a dinner he made for a friend suicidal over his dead lover consisting of a cake in the form of the beloved one’s body which his friend ate and overcame his grief.

As an artist representative of the post-WW II Art/Life movements in Milan circa 1951, Piero Manzoni was aligned with a group called The Nucleurists and in 1957 developed a series of works called “achromes” (without color) which were various objects covered with white plaster or kaolin (at about the same time Yves Klein was beginning his “Monochrome” paintings). “Achrome, 1961-62” was twelve loaves of bread covered in plaster. In “To devour art” 1961, Manzoni affixed his thumb print to hard boiled eggs and invited audiences to eat them.

*“Art is now a commodity like soap or securities...  
The great artists of tomorrow will go underground.”*

Marcel Duchamp 1961<sup>5</sup>

Along with other radical soviet movements of the Sixties, Fluxus East and West (Europe and America) evolved both as a collective and individual art/life dialectic. Developing about the same time as Pop art and consisting of the multi-media art forms of music, film, performance, dance, publications, ready-mades, multiples and installations. The movement and its participants for the most part stayed out of the commercial art market and remained “underground”. Although Fluxus influenced more established art movements, Pop, Minimalism, Conceptualism, to this day it remains a footnote in American art history. In many ways, it represents a culmination of all avant-garde art movements that preceded; and, in a conscious way, Fluxus is the standard bearer of what remains of the avant-garde today. More successful in Europe (in terms of recognition), it used the various conditions of food, sex, art and the rituals surrounding modern life as its subject matter. A playful, game-oriented joking quality often underlies a more biting commentary about our society. The numerous “food art” pieces testify to this — by way of example, George Maciunas’ “Laxative Cookies” an unrealized idea-performance by the main founder of the movement.

#### *Laxative Cookies*

*“Feb. 17, 1970: Fux Mass by George Maciunas...  
Communion: priest with chasuble front a Venus de Milo  
offers to congregation cookies prepared with laxative and  
blue urine pills.”<sup>6</sup>*

This piece could be complemented by Fluxus East with Daniel Spoerri’s EAT ART show (1961) and “An Anecdoted Topography of Chance” (1962), a catalogue of the objects in his Paris apartment. By way of much of this work being divorced from actual art objects and being presented in publications such as the “Fluxus Newspaper” or multiples, thus allowing the artist’s economic freedom from the consumer culture and freedom to criticize it through a non-elitist art form. [As of this writing, it should be noted that Vytautas Landsbergis, the current president of Lithuania, was Maciunas’ childhood friend and a Fluxus member. He is now holding out against a two month siege by the Russian military while staying in a government building.]

# RYAN LEE

RYAN LEE GALLERY LLC  
515 WEST 26TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
212 397 0742  
RYANLEEGALLERY.COM

“The Starving Artists’ Cookbook” is an attempt to present an instigation of art into life with sometimes mundane and sometimes outrageous means as represented by the thoughts, ideas, recipes, and art collected in this book.

Paul & Melissa EIDIA  
Ides of March, 1991

<sup>1</sup> From a video tape interview with George Maciunas by Larry Miller in 1978.

<sup>2</sup> Bowlt, John, “Russian Art of the Avant Garde” Thames and Hudson, Inc., New York, New York, 1988, p. 81.

<sup>3</sup> English summery [sic] from an issue on Daniel Spoerri, “Du”, January 1989, Zurich, translated by David Simon.

<sup>4</sup> Sergei Bugaev (Africa) and Andrei Khlobystin, “Flash Art”, March/ April 1990, p. 124 (in an interview).

<sup>5</sup> The New York Times, March 26, 1961; Canaday, John, “Whither Art?” on remarks made at the Philadelphia Museum College of Art on the subject “Where do we go from here?”

<sup>6</sup> Maciunas, George, “Fluxus Newspaper No. 9”, 1970 (as in “Fluxus Codex”, p. 143, edited by Jon Hendricks, 1988).

This preface by Paul Lamarre & Melissa Wolf is reproduced in full as it appears in *FOOD SEX ART the Starving Artists’ Cookbook*, published in 1991 by EIDIA (idea) Books in New York.

The exhibition at RYAN LEE features a selection of 32 works from the roster of over 160 participating artists in the cookbook and video series that spanned from 1986 to 1991. The art duo collected art and recipes and recorded artists’ cooking during the “heyday” of New York’s East Village. EIDIA also traveled to Europe videotaping and collecting recipes in Paris, Cologne, London, Amsterdam, Verona and Milan.

Artists featured in *FOOD SEX ART the Starving Artists’ Cookbook* at RYAN LEE include Peter Beard, Howard Ben Tré, Louise Bourgeois, John Cage, Papo Colo, Deborah Davis, Stephanie Denyer, Andrea Evans, Janet Fish, Luis Frangella, Gilbert and George, Golba, Barbara Hertel and Don Voisine, Sophie Herxheimer, Andrei Khlobystin, Komar and Melamid, Shigeko Kubota, Taylor Mead, Jonas Mekas, Brad Melamed, Nicholas Micros, Marilyn Minter, Lori Montana, Judy Negron, Dennis Oppenheim, David Sandlin, Carolee Schneemann, Ira Schneider, Betty Tompkins, William Wegman, Hannah Wilke and Bob Witz.

Paul Lamarre and Melissa Wolf are artists from New York City who work collaboratively under the name EIDIA (“Everything I Do Is Art.”) Together, they serve as co-executive directors of EIDIA House, a Brooklyn-based meeting place and forum for artists, scholars, poets, writers, architects and others interested in “idée force” the arts as an instrument for positive social change. EIDIA’s practice presents its form through multimedia installations, photography, sculpture, video, painting and aesthetic research. Their endeavors explore the dynamics of art politics, social spaces and the environment. EIDIA works are in numerous private collections, museums, art institutions and in over 200 prominent universities and colleges internationally.

In conjunction with the exhibition, EIDIA will present *Done Decks* in RLWindow. Concurrently on view at the gallery is **Christopher Cook**: *Shadows We Run For* (July 11–August 10). For press inquiries, please contact Bridget Casey at [bridget@ryanleegallery.com](mailto:bridget@ryanleegallery.com) or 212-397-0742.