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The Edible Sculpture Party: If You Build It, They Will Eat

What once started as a party in a residential backyard in upstate New York, has transformed into a much-anticipated annual event amongst the culinary-inclined artists of the Hudson Valley: the Edible Sculpture Party, a quirky celebration -- and competition -- of artwork comprised of consumable food. The brainchild of Bard College professors Tim Davis and Lisa Sanditz, this annual summertime event -- now in its fifth year -- took place the other weekend in Tivoli, NY on the grounds of Bard's Center for Curatorial Studies, which now helps facilitate the function since it appears to only get bigger with each passing year.

"I do miss the days of it happening organically in our back yard, but it just became bigger and harder to manage," said co-founder Tim Davis. "Having a curatorial school backing it was the perfect fit. It's great to have a school that expands on the way art is displayed and experienced."



Each year, the increased popularity of the event has brought a stronger attitude to win, or at least get an honorable mention. Gone are the days where many participants simply made makeshift structures playing off the obvious pun "Leaning Tower of Pizza" (although there was still one of those); this year the coveted trophy aprons were awarded to Oana Marian, John Bianchi, Prudence Peiffer, Christie Sosnowski for their "Welcome to Aubergiverny," a landscape on a platter, comprised of fresh green vegetables -- complete with a bridge over a pool of babaghanoush. Also awarded was the conceptual "Chore Boy" by Steffen Hyder, and "Victory Garden," an anthropomorphic spread of cornbread, eggplant, and various vegetables, by Suko Presseau, Katherine Fleming, and Kava Gorna.

Honorable mentions went to Peter Rostovsky, Claire Lehmann, and Mary Donnelly for their Calder-esque "The Sound of Sausage;" Nina Katchadourian and Sina Najafi for their pun-filled "Hall and Oates" (a pack of Halls and bowl of oats on a small stage with

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microphones); and Lucy Armstrong and Dorsey Waxter for their Mexican skull-inspired "Day of the Dead Amy," made out of rice, corn, and edible flowers.

Judging the edible entries was Tom Eccles, Executive Director of Bard's Center for Curatorial Studies; artist Polly Apfelbaum; Bjanette Andersen, local restaurateur; and curiously, two girls: Scout Mucher and Lily Ruth Apap.

"A log cabin usually impresses boy judges, but it doesn't really impress girls," said Carol Shadford, who, with partner Michael Tong, had hoped to win with their "Sustainable Architecture with Spam Firewall (and Geothermal Heating)" -- a model of a log cabin made of hot dogs protected by a wall of Spam cubes, all atop a barbecue grill to make smoke effects.

"Next time I'll have to do a collaboration," said Barb Smith, an adjunct professor at nearby SUNY-New Paltz, who created the solo work, "Heat Dome" of spicy chocolate graham cracker crust and cherries that wasn't quite ready for such a competitive contest -- one that she said had "become a little bit more institutionalized" than what she'd seen in previous years. For others, like designer Alex Sherwin, it was a worthy accomplishment not to win, but to know that people devoured his entry -- "Electric Dreams of Asian Lettuce Tacos," a mixed media face of shredded chicken, vegetables and herbs -- faster than the other edible sculptures when the judging was over and the eating of art began.

Despite the increased popularity of the event, the Edible Sculpture party still retained its original casual "friendly barbecue" charm; there were children running around while Full Tang, a band from Boston, played reggae and soul music on a makeshift stage on the grass. Whether or not the Edible Sculpture Party will grow even bigger next year is yet to be determined, but Davis is hopeful -- for art's sake. "Originally when we started [the Edible Sculpture Party], we wanted to get it in the *New York Times*' Style section," he said. "Our new goal is to get it on the cover of *Art Forum*." His ambitions are not limited to New York's Hudson Valley, or America for that matter. "My dream is that someone else will say, 'We want to host the party,' and it could move somewhere else entirely. We've already had one artist, Christine Hill of Volksboutique, ask our blessing to do one in Berlin, which I think she did. Let there be Edible Sculpture Parties in every city!"

Until the day that the quirky food sculptures come to a city near you, there will always be that original one in upstate New York, the one that proved that if you build art out of food, people will definitely come. **ERIK R. TRINIDAD**