

Raúl Ortega Ayala – *Food for Thought*

4.5.2017 – 10.6.2017

To eat is to respond to need in the form of hunger and desire in the form of appetite. In *Food for Thought* Raúl Ortega Ayala serves up a visceral response to scenes of the gastronomically grotesque that occurs when alimentary consumption is decoupled from the need much less desire for food. The result of a three year long anthropological-like process of embedding himself in the food business, Ortega Ayala revels in the ecstatic psychology of action disassociated from reason, and offers the body as sensory receptor of the pleasures derived from the “gustatory abject”¹.

Cultural identity consolidates as much around notions of taste as it does around dis-taste, since in consecrating the sacred we simultaneously define the profane. The concept of taste is an ever-evolving reflection of social values; thus, it is a moving and wholly abstracted target around which collective agreement is sought to achieve social cohesion with the purpose of distinguishing the erudite from uncouth.

The preposterousness of the aspiration to consolidate “good taste”—literally or metaphorically—into a single sazón is reflected in Ortega Ayala’s *Bable Fat Tower*. In fat and bones he has constructed a replica of the mythic tower painted in 1563 by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, which he has left under hot stage lamps to slouch into an acrid puddle. Certainly there is a macabre delight in witnessing the biblical symbol of humanity’s arrogance collapse in slow motion under the weight of its own hubris. In emphasizing the process of pathetic demise of the archetypal tower, the piece suggests the boom but also emphasizes the bust cycles of human civilization. Though the specific reasons for individual rises and falls of social orders may be morally or politically charged, the cycles that they together comprise are morally indifferent.

A natural reaction of frustration at the incapacity of such cycles to account for morality galvanizes Ortega Ayala’s *Melting Pots*. After the viewer moves through a labyrinthine presentation of September 11 ephemera, the artist presents a replica of a buffet for the public to eat modeled after one served at the Windows on the World restaurant that crowned Twin Tower Building One in New York. The food is presented on servingware sold by companies whose goods are produced from salvaged metal, including scrap that was sourced from Ground Zero debris. The uncertainty of the material’s origins leaves the question open ended, focusing on the cycle of debris, rather than fetishizing a specific horror. We are left to wonder, how many meals have been cooked, what nourishment or nibble has been served up in pots and pans smelted from other unknown atrocities? Yet, why should we expect the cycle of scrap metal

to be more morally aware than any other systemic cycles? Has the water we drink witnessed less abomination than these plates?

Whereas the frustration that *Melting Pots* may invoke questions the appropriate response to horror and abjection, Ortega Ayala’s video works *Tomatina-Tim* and *Untitled (Cheese Rolling)*, find ecstatic catharsis in their grotesque revelation.

Tomatina-Tim juxtaposes a solitary competitive gurgitator² inhaling Nathan’s restaurant (of Coney Island hotdog eating contest fame) franks and soggy buns two by two with scenes of the heaving mob of shirtless tourists tearing at one another in the annual Tomatina tomato fight in Buñol, Spain. In *Untitled (Cheese Rolling)*, men in Gloucester, England career “ass over teakettle” racing one another to catch a cheese wheel rolling down Cooper’s Hill in an annual tradition that villagers say dates back to Roman or perhaps even Phœnician times.

There is a temptation to excuse these grotesque performances as contemporary manifestations of ancient pagan celebrations of perhaps fertility cum bounty—as though a traceable link to mythic paganism would sufficiently sugar-coat abjection to be comfortably palatable. The twist, however, in *Tomatina-Tim* and *Untitled (Cheese Rolling)* is that there is no spiritual *raison d’être*. The excess of food is a celebratory red herring. These events persist as traditions perhaps simply because they tap into human hunger to delight in taboo, because to achieve *jouissance* in the muck is to feel alive.

Headless exuberance after all serves a function, filth and all. Like a ritual in reverse, the madness drives out the demons precisely by giving in to them. In the small town of Buñol, once the tourists are gone, the acid of the tomatocæs leaves the plaza clean.

–Kim Córdova

1 Nun Halloran, Vivian, *Biting Reality: Extreme Eating and the Fascination with the Gustatory Abject*, Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies 4, The University of Iowa, 2004.

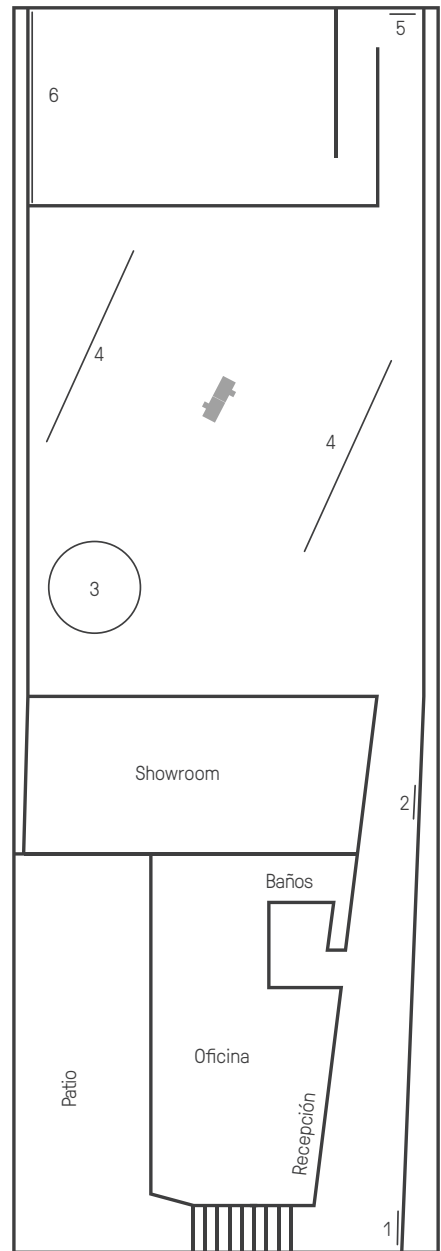
2 Gurgitator is the preferred term for a competitive eater by the Major League Eating Federation.

- 1 *I'm Hungry/I'm Satisfied*, from the series *Food for Thought*, 2010
Print on canvas
145 x 112 cm
- 2 *Field note 27-07-10-1 (Stuffed Pig)*, from the series *Food for Thought*, 2017
Acrylic and oil on canvas
30.4 x 23 x 2.2 cm
- 3 *Babel Fat Tower*, from the series *Food for Thought*, 2010
Fat, bones, table and lights
Variable dimensions
- 4 *Tomatina-Tim*, from the series *Food for Thought*, 2016
Two screen video installation, 13'53"
Variable dimensions
In collaboration with Elena Pardo, Félix Blume and Ramón Cœlho
- 5 *Field note 27-07-10-2 (Stuffed Duck)*, from the series *Food for Thought*, 2017
Acrylic and oil on canvas
28 x 35.3 x 3.5 cm
- 6 *Untitled (Cheese Rolling)*, from the series *Food for Thought*, 2017
HD video, no sound, 8'56"
Variable dimensions
In collaboration with Iain Frengley and Roberto Rubalcava

GROUND FLOOR

Melting Pots (a Fiction Based on Facts), from the series *Food for Thought*, 2006
Installation with found documentation: video, food, archive images, kitchenware, wood table, map
Variable dimensions

* This installation was accompanied by a happening on the opening night, during which visitors were invited to eat from the buffet prepared and designed by chef Norma Listman.



This exhibition was possible with the kind support of Rafael Ortega and Massey University School of Art, New Zealand.

Image credits

Raúl Ortega Ayala - Food for Thought

#foodforthought

#raulortegaayala

@_monclova

File: 1 Install Melting Pots

Melting Pots (a Fiction Based on Facts), from the series *Food for Thought*, 2006

Installation with found documentation: video, food, archive images, kitchenware, wood table, map

Variable dimensions

Installation view at *Food for Thought*, PROYECTOSMONCLOVA, Mexico City, 2017

Courtesy of Raúl Ortega Ayala and PROYECTOSMONCLOVA

Photo: Rodrigo Viñas

File: 2 Detail Melting Pots

Melting Pots (a Fiction Based on Facts), from the series *Food for Thought*, 2006

Installation with found documentation: video, food, archive images, kitchenware, wood table, map

Variable dimensions

Detail of installation view at *Food for Thought*, PROYECTOSMONCLOVA, Mexico City, 2017

Courtesy of Raúl Ortega Ayala and PROYECTOSMONCLOVA

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Variable dimensions

Installation view at *Food for Thought*, PROYECTOSMONCLOVA, Mexico City, 2017

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Variable dimensions

Installation view at *Food for Thought*, PROYECTOSMONCLOVA, Mexico City, 2017

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File: 5 Install Melting Pots

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Installation with found documentation: video, food, archive images, kitchenware, wood table, map

Variable dimensions

Installation view at *Food for Thought*, PROYECTOSMONCLOVA, Mexico City, 2017

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Photo: Rodrigo Viñas

File: 6 Install Melting Pots

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Installation with found documentation: video, food, archive images, kitchenware, wood table, map

Variable dimensions

Installation view at *Food for Thought*, PROYECTOSMONCLOVA, Mexico City, 2017

Courtesy of Raúl Ortega Ayala and PROYECTOSMONCLOVA

Photo: Rodrigo Viñas

File: 7 Install Melting Pots

PROYECTOSMONCLOVA

Melting Pots (a Fiction Based on Facts), from the series *Food for Thought*, 2006

Installation with found documentation: video, food, archive images, kitchenware, wood table, map

Variable dimensions

Installation view at *Food for Thought*, PROYECTOSMONCLOVA, Mexico City, 2017

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Photo: Rodrigo Viñas

File: 8 Detail Melting Pots

Melting Pots (a Fiction Based on Facts), from the series *Food for Thought*, 2006

Installation with found documentation: video, food, archive images, kitchenware, wood table, map

Variable dimensions

Detail of installation view at *Food for Thought*, PROYECTOSMONCLOVA, Mexico City, 2017

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File: 9 Detail Melting Pots

Melting Pots (a Fiction Based on Facts), from the series *Food for Thought*, 2006

Installation with found documentation: video, food, archive images, kitchenware, wood table, map

Variable dimensions

Detail of installation view at *Food for Thought*, PROYECTOSMONCLOVA, Mexico City, 2017

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File: 10 Install Melting Pots

Melting Pots (a Fiction Based on Facts), from the series *Food for Thought*, 2006

Installation with found documentation: video, food, archive images, kitchenware, wood table, map

Variable dimensions

PROYECTOSMONCLOVA

Installation view at *Food for Thought*, PROYECTOSMONCLOVA, Mexico City, 2017
Courtesy of Raúl Ortega Ayala and PROYECTOSMONCLOVA
Photo: Rodrigo Viñas

File: 11 Install Melting Pots

Melting Pots (a Fiction Based on Facts), from the series *Food for Thought*, 2006
Installation with found documentation: video, food, archive images, kitchenware, wood table, map
Variable dimensions

Installation view at *Food for Thought*, PROYECTOSMONCLOVA, Mexico City, 2017
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Photo: Rodrigo Viñas

File: 12 Install Melting Pots

Melting Pots (a Fiction Based on Facts), from the series *Food for Thought*, 2006
Installation with found documentation: video, food, archive images, kitchenware, wood table, map
Variable dimensions

Installation view at *Food for Thought*, PROYECTOSMONCLOVA, Mexico City, 2017
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Photo: Rodrigo Viñas

File: 13 Detail Melting Pots

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Installation with found documentation: video, food, archive images, kitchenware, wood table, map
Variable dimensions

Detail of installation view at *Food for Thought*, PROYECTOSMONCLOVA, Mexico City, 2017
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Files: 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 20, 21 Install Melting Pots (*)

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Installation with found documentation: video, food, archive images, kitchenware, wood table, map

Variable dimensions

Installation view at *Food for Thought*, PROYECTOSMONCLOVA, Mexico City, 2017

Courtesy of Raúl Ortega Ayala and PROYECTOSMONCLOVA

Photo: Rodrigo Viñas

(*) This installation was accompanied by a happening on the opening night, during which visitors were invited to eat a replica of a buffet that was served at the Windows on the World restaurant in New York. The buffet for this iteration was prepared and designed by chef Norma Listman.

File: 22 Install Food for Thought

Installation view at *Food for Thought*, PROYECTOSMONCLOVA, Mexico City, 2017

Courtesy of Raúl Ortega Ayala and PROYECTOSMONCLOVA

Photo: Rodrigo Viñas

File: 23 Install Food for Thought

Installation view at *Food for Thought*, PROYECTOSMONCLOVA, Mexico City, 2017

Courtesy of Raúl Ortega Ayala and PROYECTOSMONCLOVA

Photo: Rodrigo Viñas

File: 24 Tomatina-Tim still

Tomatina-Tim, from the series *Food for Thought*, 2016

Two screen video installation, 13'53"

Variable dimensions

In collaboration with Elena Pardo, Félix Blume and Ramón Coelho

Courtesy of Raúl Ortega Ayala and PROYECTOSMONCLOVA

File: 25 Babel Fat Tower

Babel Fat Tower, from the series *Food for Thought*, 2010

Fat, bones, table and lights

Variable dimensions

Installation view at *Food for Thought*, PROYECTOSMONCLOVA, Mexico City, 2017

Courtesy of Raúl Ortega Ayala and PROYECTOSMONCLOVA

Photo: Rodrigo Viñas

File: 26 Babel Fat Tower

Babel Fat Tower, from the series *Food for Thought*, 2010

Fat, bones, table and lights

Variable dimensions

Installation view at *Yes Naturally*, Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, Netherlands

Courtesy of Raúl Ortega Ayala and PROYECTOSMONCLOVA

File: 27 Install Cheese Rolling

Untitled (Cheese Rolling), from the series *Food for Thought*, 2017

HD video, no sound, 8'56"

Variable dimensions

In collaboration with Iain Frengley and Roberto Rubalcava

Installation view at *Food for Thought*, PROYECTOSMONCLOVA, Mexico City, 2017

Courtesy of Raúl Ortega Ayala and PROYECTOSMONCLOVA

Photo: Rodrigo Viñas

File: 28 Cheese Rolling film still

Untitled (Cheese Rolling), from the series *Food for Thought*, 2017

HD video, no sound, 8'56"

Variable dimensions

In collaboration with Iain Frengley and Roberto Rubalcava

Courtesy of Raúl Ortega Ayala and PROYECTOSMONCLOVA

File: 29 I'm Hungry I'm Satisfied

I'm Hungry/I'm Satisfied, from the series *Food for Thought*, 2010

Print on canvas

145 x 112 x 3.5 cm

PROYECTOSMONCLOVA

Courtesy of Raúl Ortega Ayala and PROYECTOSMONCLOVA

Photo: Rodrigo Viñas