

# Daniela Dostálková, Linda Dostálková: **Palate Cleanser**

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Curatorial text for the exhibitions at PLATO:

Boris Camaca: Locomotion (The Unfinished Path)

Marek Meduna: Island of Relative Stability

Alina Schmuck: seeping in

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Boris Camaca: Locomotion (The Unfinished Path), PLATO, Ostrava, 2025. Photo: Martin Polák, PLATO

## **Palate Cleanser**

New ginger  
and agar jelly rice  
with watercress;

cucumber and eggplant  
pickled in rice bran;  
acorn noodle soup,

wild garlic flowers,  
seven spice powder.

Rice flour dumplings,  
broad beans,  
musk melon, medlar, cherry,  
chickpea custard gelée,  
tomato water,  
water shield with waterpepper vinegar.

Shiso flowers,  
pickled ume purée  
with kinome herb  
(prickly ash leaf bud),  
and multi spherical tatin of sorrel.

Liquid salad  
with flavor concentration:  
sprouts.

Multispherical pesto  
with pistachios  
scorzonera  
gelatin.

Essens of beetroot,  
Tomato & Vanilla  
and blended kimchi with rosehip paste.

Potato soufflé  
with bonnotte potato  
on winter truffle, porcini,  
ramson caper with miso,  
young horseradish greens.

Buckwheat noodles,  
saffron, bees wax  
and pear Doyenné du Comice  
with verjus.

We introduce into the discussion of contemporary art, visual culture, and social rituals a perspective in which the worlds of art and gastronomy manifest through similar staging strategies. In both fields we find forms that go beyond pure function and transform casual observation into a notable event. By involving gastronomy, however, we are not trying to commodify food or optimize nutrient intake, but rather to make visible its social relationships and communal nature, which create an alternative economy based on a common present and the transformation of spectators into participants. “Decisions about what is eaten, where,

and with whom are governed by rules of appropriateness which relate the food to social events.” (Mary Douglas, *Deciphering a Meal*, 1972).

According to notions of contemporary gastronomy, people’s relationships to food should be understood in terms that go beyond just the individual – food is not only a matter of personal preferences but is also a powerful tool with social, political, economic, and environmental consequences. “Food is not only a collection of products that can be studied statistically or nutritionally; it is also a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior.” (Roland Barthes, *Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption*, 1961). We can then observe that it is precisely these phenomena, common to both art and contemporary gastronomy, that provide a set of means that transcend mere sensory attraction.

Looking at contemporary art and the social practices associated with food, we find pictorial and sensorial scenes that call to mind a theatre stage: a space where meaning and structure, corporeality, identity, the manifestation of experience, and a political dimension are connected. Here, theatricality in gastronomy and art serves as a parallel mechanism of staging and communication: a work of art and a meal are both products of the interplay between process and idea. Both forms of “consumption” create scenarios and layers of meaning, revealing that what we take into the body or the mind is always more than mere substance – consumption is an event, a staged act, and an expression of society as a whole, a society that has a hierarchy of tastes and preferences, and ways of constructing identity. “Food is good to eat, but also good to think.” (Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism, from the original Le Totémisme aujourd’hui*, trans. Rodney Needham, 1963)

We can speak about theatricality in the context of art and gastronomy thanks to a certain “excess” of energy. The essence of theatricality lies in emphasis, exaggeration in gestures and situations, greater captivation and immersion – the perceptibility and intensity of experience, which can offer an experience more sharply rendered than reality, a sort of “hyperbole” of actuality. This form of exaggeration, in the context of gastronomy and art, reveals itself to be their condensed form, a way through which expressive strategies become an effective and meaningful means of articulation. Here though it is not about the idea of a grand spectacle but about a natural mechanism we use to consciously shape a scene of everydayness, or rather the energy we devote to transforming ordinary situations into events. This “excess”, however, does not stand in opposition to care – rather, it complements and expands it. “When we cook, we produce things to eat, of course, but we produce something else too: acts of care.” (Margaret Kim Peterson, *Keeping House: The Litany of Everyday Life*, 2007). In everyday practice, this is not just a gesture but also work that maintains and nourishes. This energy does not have just a momentary effect, but it enables the emergence of continuity, relationships, and duration instead of a fleeting explosion. Cooking thus becomes a political act, not only through the preparation food, but also through the conscious selection of ingredients, ecological considerations, specific techniques, and care distributed between individuality and communal sharing. The preparation of food thus reveals that cooking may be a ritual of resistance, solidarity, and values – not just an everyday activity but a carefully considered expression of care.

Theatricality, institutionalized in certain cultural environments, reveals the complex relationships between performance, cultural expectations, and involving the audience –

both in art and gastronomy. Viewing gastronomy as nothing more than preparing, consuming, or digesting meals would then mean ignoring its cultural and symbolic dimensions.

“What we eat and how we eat are never purely about nutrition; they are expressions of meaning, social order and identity.” (Joanne Finkelstein, *Dining Out: A Sociology of Modern Manners*, 1989). Gastronomy can be seen as a socially conditioned construct embodying a set of meanings, practices, and relationships – what the sociology of food conceives as an expression of society in which identity, tradition, status, aesthetics, and power structures meet. We can understand dining at a restaurant, just like visiting a gallery, as an act during which we experience excitement, delight, and heightened sensitivity, a moment when something that is ordinarily private and personal connects with the public and the social. At the level of theatricality, both art and gastronomy appear as a platform on which cultural values are staged and made visible, mechanisms of representation are explored, and the viewer becomes an active participant. Art introduces critical distance and the ability to reflect on the methods of staging – it reveals how visual images, gestures, and materials transform into symbolic structures and how through them society articulates its conflicts, desires, tastes, and habits. “Knives, forks, and spoons are not just strips of metal, but imply a whole system of eating behavior with respect to which each actual meal is a performance.” (Andrew Feenberg, *Critical Theory of Technology*, 1991)

This trilogy of exhibitions conceives of gastronomy as a dynamic space where ordinary experience intertwines with the symbolism of ritual. This framework at the same time provides an opportunity for viewing theatricality as a parallel that broadens the way in which gastronomy (art) is read, interpreted, or experienced. Each of the exhibitions, although dedicated to different issues, thus is organically connected to the shared motif of theatricality, which combines diverse subjects into a single broader whole open to interpretation.

BORIS CAMACA uses the diversity of tastes as an instrument to create scenes that reflect cultural diversity. His work can be read as a commentary on the interconnectedness of food and economic, environmental, and social structures emerging from the multitude of available ingredients, tastes, and techniques. At the same time, he calls attention to staged oversaturation, which becomes a metaphor for the variability of the contemporary world. The protagonists of Camaca’s photographs are not static; they are brought into motion in chaotic compositions interwoven with walking, which, thanks to vivid colours, humorous styling, and an expressive narrative, create an atmosphere of surrealistic pictures that have an absurd and provocative effect.

Movement, above all walking, emerges here as a central motif – not only as a means of mobility but also as a way in which the figures exist in space, as a rhythm that determines the picture’s structure. Camaca often personally enters these scenes; he appears as an actor who not only moves along with the others but also at the same time deliberately stages himself, thus reflecting on his own presence in the pictures, which waver between documentary and intervention.

Camaca consciously works with the concept of gendered performativity, that is, with the idea that gender is not a fixed identity but something that is constantly formed through bodily expressions, stylizations, and social customs. In his works, gender gains a fluid, staged role, which can be overacted, exaggerated, or called into question. In this sense, he works with the

aesthetics of camp, a style based on irony; overexaggerated, theatrical expression; and deliberate artifice. Thanks to these means, Camaca disrupts the boundary between seriousness and parody, between mask and identity, between what we perceive to be “natural” and what is clearly constructed.

Oversaturated postproduction turns Camaca’s photography into a radiant, spiralling galaxy, where affection meets affectedness and cuteness meets comedy, and where colour serves as a vehicle of tension and unnerving attraction, as if he relishes unlikely combinations, contemporary myths, or occasional moments of stillness. The artist precisely determines the moment at which the picture-composing process culminates, and his expressive approach thus balances on the edge of our attention span.

MAREK MEDUNA uses dramaturgical models of social behaviour and an understanding of the concept of theatricality developed in the theoretical traditions to emphasize that consumption – whether of food or an image – is a symbolically charged act. Fragmentary fields of objects, natural materials, technological relics, and leftovers of the day are transformed into situations that oscillate between recognizability and inner turmoil. Marek Meduna works with painting as a space of resistance, where vulnerability, control, and dominance reveal the sensitive substrate of human experience and in which we also realize that there is not just one state of being but rather an infinite space that does not allow for simple definitions. Thus, “aesthetics” itself is not consolation but rather a precisely managed disorder. Through his approaches to installations, the artist often creates barriers obstructing clear views through spaces, but in doing so, he creates for us enough space to relax, for example, behind a moss-green curtain. Also, the endless horizons in still lifes form a quiet zone, where surprising combinations of objects appear (fossils, shells, pull tabs from aluminium cans, dried leaves, pills, pieces of plastic, hard discs, and egg cartons) lying on the textures of wood veneer or plywood of uncertain authenticity.

Laser-cut and colourfully striking boards with abstract metal segments fit together perfectly but refuse any reference to iconography. Visually related object paintings seem to be part of a construction set, relics of the archaeology of the present, or technological fragments that may be inserted into machines, or, in contrast, hold them up. In this complex environment we see several shapes that fit together perfectly, objects that refer to each other; everything is rendered more sharply than reality itself, yet the whole rudely dissolves before our eyes. Rather than being a deliberate provocation, however, these are well-aimed anthropological records.

ALINA SCHMUCH focuses on digestive processes and water cycles, which are analogically connected to corporeality and social practices; water, clean on the surface and later “consumed” and transformed, becomes an image of society’s cultural and technical metabolism. Researching and documenting technical systems connected to water management – sewers, spas, dams, pools, and bathrooms, that is, places where the intimacy of the body intertwines with public infrastructure – provide an opportunity for thinking about their hidden functions. These networks, like the human digestive system, form a delicate interface between the body and the environment, and are home to microorganisms that link together the organic and the technical. The metaphor of “digesting infrastructure” introduces a new way of understanding the city and its invisible processes. We can thus glimpse into the metabolism of society: both the water cycle and sewer systems show how

social bodies transform through cleanliness, contamination, and mechanisms that together create what we feel and what we eventually “absorb” as a society. Besides tamed rivers, underground landscapes, and hydrological processes, on display at the exhibition are also amphibious forms of life – animals that can function in variable conditions. Alina Schmuch thus suggests that people’s efforts “to order” nature are always fragile and temporary.

Modern technology, for example, autonomous inspection robots operating in sewer systems that use cameras and algorithms to map ordinarily inaccessible places, allows us “to peer into the depths”. In doing so, it transforms the way the urban setting is viewed: the city is no longer only that which we see but also that which can be understood through its internal flows and circulation systems. The exhibition thus opens the door to a deeper understanding not just of the technical aspects of the water distribution system, but also of its bodily, microbial, and social digestion.

Daniela and Linda Dostálková

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Boris Camaca is a French artist who explores identity formation by reflecting on self-presentation, gender fluidity, and the economy of images. His photography is marked by vivid colours, intentionally exaggerated stylization, and an emphasis on narrative, thanks to which he creates images that enchant the eye as much as provoke thought. In these scenes he stages performative situations in which the physical entanglements and unexpected difficulties of the protagonists turn into allegories of identity processes. Camaca is the co-founder of *Télévision* magazine, and his work has been exhibited at the NiCOLETTi gallery of contemporary art in London; Voiture14 and Art-o-rama in Marseille; Stanley & Audrey Burton Gallery in Leeds; MuseumsQuartier in Vienna; and the NADA Miami art fair.

Marek Meduna is a Czech artist whose work is based on a distinct drawing and graphic style. He often explores the body and identity through grotesque situations in which awkwardness, vulnerability, and liberating humour intertwine. At the same time, he also explores formality, ceremonialism, and rigidity, and incorporates them into his reflections on values, language, and the zeitgeist. Marek Meduna studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague. He received a PhD from the Academy of Arts, Architecture, and Design in Prague, where he also worked as an assistant in the Painting studio. From 2000 to 2018 he was a member of the Rafani art collective. He is a member of the Skutek Association and heads the Painting 4 Studio at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague.

Alina Schmuch is a German artist working with moving image and photography, exploring the relationship between visual media and reality through artistic publications and video installations. In recent years, Schmuch has focused intensively on the theme of water infrastructures as sites where technology, the body, and the environment intersect. She studied Media Art at HfG Karlsruhe and was a fellow at the Jan van Eyck Academy in Maastricht. Her work has been presented in exhibitions and screenings including at Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Urbane Künste Ruhr, Akademie der Künste, Sonic Acts, Rupert, and at the 15th Venice Architecture Biennale in collaboration with the collective Forensic Architecture.

