Peace at the tables?

When the *Food of War* art collective was created at the beginning of this decade in London by two Colombian artists, the themes tackled initially came from the Middle East as a seminal inspiration. Later on, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the Chernobyl disaster and the rise of Gastroperformance were some of the next steps in their path.

With artists mainly from Europe and Colombia, it was a matter of time that Food of War directed its efforts to Latin America, going through several subjects in Brazil, Peru and Mexico.

*Food of War* in Colombia marks the beginning of a new journey where the collective and guest artists will be fueled by the complexity of the country’s history of food-related conflict as well as its initiatives to bring healing and empowerment through working with food.

Food has been a key issue, connected to a lack of support for local farmers, the presence of paramilitary and guerrilla factions controlling large areas of land and furthermore, the eradication program using biological warfare to get rid off illicit crops but with adverse long-term effects on the soil and food crops.

Following the signing of a Peace Treaty in 2016, food has become the path to leave behind the war and embrace a new era in harmony not only with the environment but with each other. Initiatives to embrace new crops, innovative ways of trading and engaging with a global economy are a few of the strategies related to food as the route to leave the illegality and build a new Colombia. What once was the root of conflict, is now a reason to embrace peace; a peace that we all want to start from our own hearts, from our own tables.

Diversity is at the core of *Food of War* but not by assigning mere quotas of representation. The relationship between food and conflict could have a wide array of variables and those are more likely to be found by a heterogeneous mix of subjectivity. The force ticking behind each artist reflects not only inner struggles but political anxieties, personal obsessions and what is more, the essence of its own core, in this case projected into what Food of War is and could be made into. For every show, this one being no exception, artists from different nationalities, political views, genders and ages were chosen to assemble similar concepts with different procedures in an ongoing deconstruction of the political and economic relationships of power underlying the processes behind food.

From LGTB rights, ecological responsibility, political protest, food sourcing, Western colonization, the variety of subjects exemplifying the intersection of food and conflict is almost as large as the dishes made on this planet. If dissected properly, a plate of food has the potential to be a socio political biopsy of its own time. The way it is transported, served, eaten, its elements, the cooking techniques, it all reflect deeply on the location, culture, tradition, economics and so on. The aesthetic experience at *Peace at the tables* it is an art menu that attest to such affirmation and it is for the collective a first approximation to what makes Colombia so rich and unique.

Colombia is going through complex times by facing the intricacies of the postconflict, the polarisation, the Venezuelan migration and the handling of recently accessible natural resources. Sol Baily Barker, Zinaida Kubar and Marina Abramovic are some of the international artists involved in this show, each one at different stages in their own career, contribute in a more abstract way by calling more universal concepts while local artists tend to speak directly to the issues in their own communities. Others, like Raul Marroquin and Omar Castañeda, Colombians residents abroad that include global issues reflected in local representations such as The Arepas or Panela.

Leaders in their own field like Raul Marroquin (Videoart), Marina Abramovic (Performance) and Simone Matar (Gastroperformance) whose work on media adds an extra layer of flavor to the curatorial recipe are presented here as special highlights in events to break the peaceful flow of a traditional exhibition.

It would not be a Food of War show if a dinning experience were not presented as part of the viewer’s experience. Tomas Espinoza, Adriana Ramirez and Ingrid Cuestas season the exhibition with three different events working a process of integrating the Transgender community with their neighbors and detractors (Espinoza) or using the sharing of the table as part of the political reconciliation (Ramirez) or even as reivindication of the true heroes of food chain, the small producers and their traditions that are highlighted by the Gastrosophia (Cuestas).

Quintina Valero (Photography) and Rafael Gomez-Barros (Sculpture) both bold technically and in their social stances, bring pieces about the oppressed, victims of the system, survivors in their own way and in the work of these artists.

War and Food relate due to the underlining layers of power cementing their foundation, hence the way they meet in so many corners. Each artist finds a vortex relevant to his/her own practice, an intersection as valid as any other but so unique that brings an important fabric to the tapestry of speeches that the collective is becoming.

The spiderweb knitted by the strings of food and conflict unfolds almost translucent in a never ending intertwined pattern, mostly in our faces and through our stomachs. It is everywhere, at our tables, fridges and supermarkets, difficult to avoid and pushing us to the point of concluding that if we are what we eat, then we all are *Food of War.*

Hernan Barros