

■ SPECIAL REPORT ■

FOOD

GALLERY OF DISHES

Top chefs and mixologists reveal their creativity, and turn even the simplest menus into memorable plates of art, writes **VICKI WILLIAMS**

Art Basel Hong Kong 2018 is an exciting time for art lovers. It also allows some chefs and mixologists in Hong Kong to show off their artistic side, with special menus or cocktails.

Until March 31, the Michelin-starred Mandarin Grill + Bar has been turned into a chic gallery celebrating the artistic world of Konstantin Bessmertny, in conjunction with Art Advisory CONSIGG. Guests will feast their eyes on provocative art and dine on inspiring interpretations created by executive chef, Robin Zavou.

Bessmertny creates art that stimulates and often incorporates humour with cultural critique, so Zavou has created dishes designed to stimulate the senses. Each has been inspired by one of the artist's most acclaimed works. This includes "The Last Dumpling", a lobster, salmon roe, xiao long bao with black rice vinegar; "French Connections", a crab brioche toasted sandwich with truffle; "One of You", in the shape of a sheep, a delicious main of lamb loin, cauliflower textures and black garlic; and "Spectacle", a dessert of



Aqua Spirit's Shinobi cocktail

chocolate, passionfruit and mint. The special Palatable Plate of Art with Konstantin Bessmertny three- and four-course menus are available for lunch and dinner.

Also available in March, as part of Lan Kwai Fong's Savouring Art month, is the special menu from Japanese restaurant Fumi. Infusing art elements into savoury dishes, the menu is designed to delight the taste buds and the eye. This can be seen with the use of sakura, either directly or as an inspiration. The dish "Hara No Umi" combines sea bream,

sakura trout, hard clam, Spanish mackerel and ark shell, and represents the link of seasonality with the concept of art.

Cé La Vi is also joining the Savouring Art celebrations with executive chef, Jason Au, presenting his art interpretations on a plate. Inspired by the theme of "Happiness" and graffiti artist André Saraiva, the five-course menu includes beef tenderloin served with yellow pepper sauce, shimeji mushrooms, asparagus and tomato, plated to reflect Saraiva's alter-ego, the iconic cartoonish, winking, smiley face known as "Mr. A". The menu will be complemented by an exclusive exhibition in collaboration with La Galerie.

The world's first art-themed concept store dedicated to Vincent van Gogh, Van Gogh Senses, has chosen this artistic month to open. From food and confectionery to paintings and paraphernalia, every detail celebrates the artist's art. On the food side, this includes such signature dishes as Miso cod with Dutch capsciums and black truffle fries, highlighting the artist's love of Japan, and a Seafood Bouillabaisse, with the

sea and boats as the theme in a number of works. There is also a special art-inspired afternoon tea in collaboration with Faber Castell, whose products Van Gogh used for drawing.

Meanwhile, Aqua and Armani/Aqua are presenting the art-inspired Hoshi Desu menu of four curated cocktails. Hoshi Desu is derived from the Japanese phrase "wants and desires", with each cocktail representing four key figures from Japanese culture. For example, the "Shinobi", otherwise known as a ninjya, is a mix of plantation pineapple rum, Italian rosolio di bergamotto and Peychaud's bitters, shaken with lime, mint and spiced colada mix. "Geiko", another term for geisha, and directly translates as woman of art, features an interesting combination of Don Julio Resposado tequila, Pinot Grigio and Aperol, balanced with aqua and lemon juice. Armani/Aqua is also presenting edible art with the feature attraction – a steak tartare plated to resemble a vibrant artist's paint palette. On Thursday, Aqua Spirit will co-host an event with artist



Japanese restaurant Fumi has created a savoury menu as part of Lan Kwai Fong's Savouring Art month.

Francesco Lietti on-hand to paint the view of Hong Kong harbour from the 30th floor location. The piece will be available to buy on the evening, with 50 per cent of proceeds going to The Society for the Relief of Disabled Children. Tickets are HK\$300 per person, which includes two glasses of Veuve Clicquot Champagne.

Art Basel-inspired cocktails will also be available at Pirata, The Optimist and TokyoLiMa.

One of the most visually interesting is the "Tokyo Batido" at TokyoLiMa. This sweet and quirky cocktail is served in a tall glass with a paper straw, with a cotton candy pink elixir inside combining Capucina whisky, coconut water, lime juice, agave and fresh strawberries topped with rose lemonade. Meanwhile, Pirata pays homage to vermouth with its "Botanico" cocktail, and The Optimist highlights the artistic nature of figs.



Cé La Vi presents chocolate coffee mousse with coffee ganache and rosé wine cherry.



Aqua's steak tartare dish celebrates Art Basel Hong Kong 2018.



"The Last Dumpling", by Hong Kong Mandarin Grill + Bar's Robin Zavou

PROFILE OF ANTOINE D'AGATA

Photographer inspired by life in the margins of society

Lee Hill-choi

If art is the imitation of nature, as Plato suggested, the work of photographer-film director Antoine D'Agata reflects human nature at its most insubrious.

Born in Marseille in 1961, D'Agata joined one of the most prestigious photography groups in the world, Magnum Photos, in 2004. In the same year, D'Agata shot his first short film *Le Venre du Monde* (The World's Belly), which led to his long feature film, *Aka Aka*, shot in Tokyo in 2006.

D'Agata did not have a typical upbringing, spending his teenage years in violent combat for political militancy and was fascinated by those he saw living on the margins of society – he came into contact with prostitutes, junkies and thugs.

D'Agata's work reflects the raw, intense and often gripping moods and emotions that come with figures of the "underworld". He says his images are gestures that reveal the physical experience of assuming a position inside the social world and the existential void. "I believe the movement of excess defeats intelligence and dissolves all forms of order. I believe failure is more dignified than the comfort of stagnation. I believe art should be subversive, athletic and immoral: a brutal antidote to the spectacular infection that neutralises spirits and distils death."

He isn't averse to admitting that narcotic substances have long been active principles of reinvigorating his path. "My lucidity is narcotic, and in my intimate mental disorder, in that space where the brutal instincts of survival reign, I slowly found the strength to appropriate the world," D'Agata says.

Sharing his thoughts on how his style of photography and storytelling has evolved, D'Agata says he has always been obsessed with the "patient acquisition of personal methods for experiencing life or generating new types of narrative strategies". He travelled to Central America in 1983, when he was 22 years old, to "distant resolutions, in the search of self-destruction energy", and arrived in New York in the early 1990s where he enrolled at the International Center of Photography to be taught by



Antoine D'Agata's work reflects raw and intense moods and emotions.

icons such as Larry Clark and Nan Goldin.

Knowing he has been tutored by these formidable photographers doesn't come as a surprise when you see D'Agata's work. Often described as dark and disturbing, his images reflect "the economic violence that devours the world but remains nameless". To do so, he compromises himself physiologically, immersing himself into a seemingly invisible part of the world that is cursed. "I take the side of evil and embrace dissatisfaction as the only truth in the infinite movement of desire. I believe that action prevails, as an excessive art form that opens on life itself, sacrificing the comfort of oblivion. I use the beauty as a lethal strategy against the logics and mechanics of Spectacle."

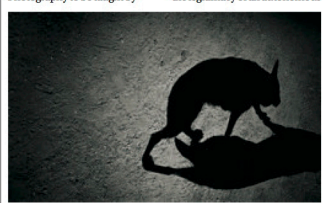
"Contamination" is a word the film director is fond of and is also the title of his exhibition. The Frenchman has often referred to his images as a way to "contaminate" photography the way we know it. It is meant to break away from conformity of pre-existing assumptions and the conventional ideology. "Actual photography amazes me by its conformism inside a market that formats it to be harmless," he says. "I feel isolated in my attempt to endorse through image gestures the legitimacy of an autonomous

political position. Contemporary human beings, hypnotised by the inexorable flow of the venomous myths they generate themselves, get lost in the fatal contemplation of their own stupidity."

D'Agata breaks away from the mediocrity that pervades the mainstream media. "Unlimited sequences of impoverished images flood the virtual social space. Superficiality and accumulation merge into a complex form of alienation that takes shape in a more artificial flux of consciousness, in a claustrophobic and narcissist community of thought. The boundaries between fiction and pure existence fade."

He believes that social media provides the permanent dissolution of senses and reason. "Most people find in photography an antidote to a process of dematerialisation that takes the seductive appearance of sophisticated social communication. But they are unaware that photography has never been about acquiring a sophisticated gaze or visual language. Photography is the language of experience and sensations. It is a tool that can help us to pursue a more profound, a more obscure way to feel and to exist. Contemporary photography speaks of confusion to the point of exhaustion. And my own photography reflects my necessity for losing myself, violating all rules, and generating my own way to understand the world and define a position inside. In this process, the act of taking photographs accepts no compromise. It involves pushing the physical limits of life, and relentlessly and desperately trying to possess the world through images."

"Contamination" by Antoine D'Agata opens at Charbon Art Space, 44 Wong Chuk Hang Road on March 29 at 6pm, in the presence of the artist and curator. The exhibition runs until May 25.



A photograph that is part of Antoine D'Agata's exhibition

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