

James Cooper and Steve Rockwell, dART Onion, 2011, video stills



Steve Rockwell, *Minced dArt*, 2011, meat grinder with shredded dArt magazine pages and cropped magazine

Making Minced Meat Out of dArt Magazine

Introducing the dArt Burger

by Steve Rockwell

The intent of the gesture behind the header *Making Minced Meat Out of dArt Magazine* is as much a creative one as a destructive one. Still, you have to break an egg to make an omelet, and what's true for the gourmand, holds for the artist or writer. Image and text have to be tenderized in some fashion before ingestion, and by that I mean that the act of reading is by no means passive. Phrases and sentences are lifted from the page, the scan of our eyes, in effect, filleting strips of copy, paragraph to paragraph.

When a page spread from an art magazine is considered, it's an invitation for a gaze particularly critical in nature, and the motivation of a critic at its

simplest, is either constructive or destructive in intent. "Art is about liking things," Andy Warhol observed, driving home the truth of the timeworn cliché, "Everyone is a critic." The heat of our attention prunes, parses, and processes what the senses collect, in effect mincing what we take in. Then with a bit of rumination in the oven of our sensorium, the dish is baked and ready to serve. Our lived experiences likewise constitutes a supermarket of possible platters. What we choose to dish out depends entirely on who our dinner guests are.

The *dArt Burger* was rolled out this summer at De Luca Fine Arts in Toronto with certain amount of fanfare. No question, the food connection put the gas in the tank for this vehicle. In 1989 I introduced the artworld to the *Steve Rockwell Sandwich*. When food critic James Chatto came by to sample, he deemed it "an excellent sandwich,"

his enthusiasm, a demonstration of the natural affinity between food and art.

The depth of historic connections between the words "food" and "art" are betrayed by shopworn linguistic vestiges. The words "taste" and "culture," are lingering aftertastes of a deep-rooted relationship that flavors the entire cultural enchilada. If effete luxury prompts something to be declared as "civilized," it is so because we ingest with our eyes and other senses as much as our stomachs. An argument may be advanced that all products of civilization have undergone profound aestheticization, whether we like the particular thing or not. And that's the point: liking or not liking something lies at the back of everything. The big idea that bobs to the surface is the notion that culture as we know it, is impossible without a fully developed agriculture, and that it is surplus food production that has fueled the hunger for the fine, useless things that we enjoy. Hunter-gatherer societies, if pressed, would no doubt have considered the building of a pyramid as a 'colossal' waste of time and energy. Far better to cozy up in a dimly-lit cave after some choice gaming and berry picking, and then scratch out a picture of the buck that got away.

Anyone wishing to pursue this line of discourse, need only to take in a

Receipt Header	
Date:	Sep 21, 2011 22:29:40
Table:	14
TableTransId:	2000967
TransId:	2001043
Seats:	1
Server:	Katie
1 DART	9.00
1 Large Fries	4.00
Subtotal	13.00
HST	1.69
Total	14.69
Balance	14.69
Receipt Footer	

Steve Rockwell, *BQM dArt Burger Receipt*, 2011, digital scan of paper receipt, 4" x 3"

screening of Werner Herzog's *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*. The recent discovery of a vast complex of caves in southern France illustrates humankind's primitive link between art and food. Aside from the occasional hand print and a single graphic depiction of a fleshy female form, the subject here is decidedly animal. The question that begs to be aswered is, "What was more important to early man, food or sex?" The Chauvet cave drawings of southern France, being the oldest known pictorial creations of humankind, tilt the answer overwhelmingly to food over sex. In a hunting society, its appears, food is all. To the cave-dwellers, in these vivid figurations of the subject of their hunt, art and food intermingle as one. As the title of Herzog's film suggests, these depictions constitute nothing less than lucid dreams of the first human artists.

My own fling with food as art began on a decidedly superficial note. The reasoned premise in 1989 was simply, "An artist should be able to have a sandwich named after him as much as an entertainer." Well, that was the pitch to Tom Gottlieb, my art dealer at the time, and he gulped it up. An attempt to dissuade him from the idea,

garnered a furious response, "No, do the sandwich! Do the sandwich!" As I recall, he actually stamped his feet on the ground during the outburst.

When restaurateur Saeed Mohamed attended a 21st birthday serving of the *Steve Rockwell Sandwich* last year at Fran Hill Gallery, the wheels started to turn in the direction of a new food product for his three BQM Burger Shoppe outlets. Since a sandwich had already been done, a unique burger concept might fit the bill. Film producer Ben Marshall and I had already been casting around for something to cook up, and the burger idea held the promise of, if nothing else, a lunch.

The meat grinder eventually settled into the position of the iconic symbol for, not just the mincing of the meat, but also the cutting up of *dArt* magazine itself. Marshall insisted that we had to have an actual grinder in the exhibiton. We agreed that the modern electric model that Saeed had in his restaurant would not resonate as well in people's mind as a smaller, more classic one. I painted the metallic surface of the grinder white to blend in with the white of the paper in the collages, and removed the grinding



Steve Rockwell and Saeed Mohamed, the dArt Burger, 2011, in a photo at BQM restaurant by Ben Marshall

mechanism itself. I then replaced the round perforated metal nozzle with a paper one, enabling long, narrow mylar-reinforced strips of *dArt* pages to sprout from the holes. Art dealer Corrado De Luca thought of strewing the gallery floor with shredded pages of *dArt* magazine. This held some appeal to me, but just dumping a bag of my leftover collage scraps on the floor under the wall-installed grinder was enough to achieve the desired effect.

At one our bull sessions, Saeed came up with the idea of dicing the burger ingredients into a table display. He dubbed it a "pixilated burger." When assembled, the pieces would form the image of a large hamburger. The notion had come to him from his attendance of my *Steve Rockwell Sandwich* exhibition at Fran Hill Gallery, where I had exhibited a gridded paper collage painting of my sandwich. In this De Luca exhibition, I inked a simple gridded line schematic of the burger to serve as a template to assist in the assemblage of the burger ingredients. At first we considered using the burger grid as a functioning buffet service for



Steve Rockwell and Saeed Mohamed, The Pixilated dArt Burger, 2011, installation view at De Luca Fine Art in a photo by James Cooper. Gallery owner, Corrado De Luca is in the center in dark shirt and with his back turned

the guests at the reception, but settled on it as art display only. The accessible morsels proved somewhat irresistible to some guests at the opening, which was certainly understandable. The resultant tension between art and life, however, was not altogether undesirable from a certain amusing perspective, as a few patrons yielded to their impulse to consume the display.

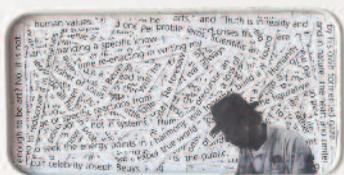
The *dArt Burger* prompted the production of two short films directed by James Cooper, initial offerings to a longer-term documentary treatment on the subject, with Ben Marshall as producer. A selection of still images from the first one, *dArt Onion*, are displayed on page 16. The low-tech animation premise behind its production was simply to run camera close-ups of my hands rapidly shuffling image and text shards from *dArt* magazine

back issues. I lifted the text strips from reviews and articles that *dArt* has run over the years. Here are some typical examples: "Follow the form and belief will follow." "A vivid piece of confessional theater." "Surreal, seductive, and choreographed." "A space for redemption." "Engaged just long enough to get the message." Director Cooper added an electronic music sound track to the video, augmenting it with his own splicing and shuffling of images.

The shooting of the *dArt Burger* was substantially more painstaking than *dArt Onion*, since food was involved. Cooper wanted individual captures of each ingredient before assembling the finished burger. Alternate mistings of oil and water kept our vegetative co-stars looking country fresh. The towering *dArt Burger* slider that graces the cover of this edition of *dArt* is the resultant

still image from the video. While Saeed Mohamed cooked the burgers at BQM, all of our footage was shot at the De Luca gallery, and we had to resort to a cigarette lighter for the melted cheese effect.

In his web column in the *Torontoist*, writer Jeremy Woodcock took down some of the exchanges Saeed and I had about the creation of the *dArt Burger*, "It was more like, 'Saeed, go back in the kitchen and bring me out something!'" he recalls, chuckling. "So I would just go in the kitchen, make something, bring it out to him, yay, nay, go back in the kitchen, make something, come back again. That's kinda how it worked... it's a commissioned piece. That's why I was telling everybody, this is not my creation. This is Steve Rockwell's creation."



Patently padded into the fog of myth



Curiously and often mysteriously directed



And so here we have the conundrum



His idea is that everyone is an artist



Freedom to empty the mind



For those who believe and those who don't

Steve Rockwell, *Six Image Patties*, 2011, a digital composition of six individual works, each original measuring 15" x 18". Top row from the left: first image: Joseph Beuys photo against text by Steve Rockwell; second image: photo of diver against Bridgett Riley painting; third image: Bill Viola photo of man over Ed Ruscha painting. Second row from the left: first image: photo of performance artist Papo Colo over Odd Nerdrum painting; second image: Edward Steichen photo of Katharine Hepburn over sculpture by Jesus Morales; third image: Steve Rockwell photo of dog, Gordo, over Lawrence Weiner sculpture installation