

Digesting the first bites

Mix together a studio space with five young artists, working in a variety of mediums which provides them with an even more diverse group of contacts and you might have an ideal recipe for dinner-time conversations. This must have been what the group of artists that share a studio space at the Hooghiemstraplein in Utrecht thought when they came up with the idea of organizing a series of 'studio-dinners'.

At the dinner that will be discussed in this article the topic was food design and it was organized by Anna Brecht and Karlijn Souren. After starting with food design, Anna and Karlijn joined forces in their company *Everything But a Slice of Bread*. Initially, the both of them started with this relatively young branch on the designer tree somewhat coincidentally – 'we kind of rolled into it' – but nowadays they have created a solid base for their designer activities. Such coincidental developments also played a role in Liv Kooijmans' involvement with food design. As a schooled industrial designer, she received an assignment related to food design and after that, those assignments more or less kept coming. So one might say these three are designers, working with food. This description definitely fits Winanda Hendriks, who doesn't think of herself being a food designer as such, coming from a background in creative communication. Winanda thinks of food as a medium, appropriate for communicating thoughts and ideas. Basically, all participants can relate to this view. All, but one. For Taiji Masayuki Tajima food is passion, it's incorporated in his DNA and is therefore not a means to an end, but an end in itself.

Without getting too personal, an attempt is made to come to an agreement of how food design can be defined. In order to do this, some questions concerning design in general surfaced. Taiji pondered whether or not design was an absolute, since in daily life beautiful things and sequences thereof also exist. Karlijn had been wondering about this as well. She found herself questioning what she, as a designer, had to offer to the world. And as Liv replied that a sense of happiness can be stimulated by providing more than just the necessary, Anna thought it went even further. In her view, design is about telling stories, about putting seeds for new thoughts in peoples minds. Suzanne Rietdijk, one of the artists working in the studio, added that designers have the potential to make a difference in society, however small it may be. But getting at the point where you start affecting people seemed to have a lot to do with the research that precedes a project or object.

While the duration of and sources for research seemed to vary, the discussion shifted toward a more practical matter of conducting research: financing it. Common denominator proved to be that this was a hard nut to crack. Dilemma's encompassed what part of the budget you could dedicate to research and whether or not you could get paid for just providing a client with a concept. Most of the difficulties seemed to boil down to the fact that food design has not yet gained a very strong position in the proverbial food-chain of the designer world. Because food design does not have a clear-cut identity for most clients, too often they still tend to regard it as being some sort of upgraded form of catering. This makes it hard to defend the budget for the artistic labor the designer puts into it, which is a heartfelt frustration for everyone at the table. A practical solution is offered by deducting the process into separate parts (research, tests, concept, execution, etc.). Nevertheless, this does not make up for the fact that the project-based character of food design makes it hard to get long-term funding.

A kick-off for a more lasting solution is given with the idea that working in a collective might provide the young artists with a stronger base. From her experience in the Creative Factory in Rotterdam, Winanda has noticed the profits of the collective. A collective makes it possible to provide clients with a guarantee that the project will be a success, based on

the extensive amount of combined knowledge and expertise. In this way, participants in a collective can use each others accomplishments to boost their careers in stead of having to rely on just their own CV. Furthermore, the larger amount of contacts produces more attention from, amongst others, the press. And it was mutually agreed upon that attention from the press was the best stimulant for commissions.

Suzanne, who has been operating in the designer-collective *De Groene Honden* for some time now, admits that artistically, a collective gives you more strength. However, on a more practical level, communication proved to be very important. Constructing an executive protocol and getting the people together that actually match in the way they approach their work took *De Groene Honden* approximately 1,5 year. This means it will take quite some time and effort to create a well-functioning collective.

Another solution to solve the general ignorance towards food design, is to create some sort of food design database. By mapping all activities that it encompasses, clients can be referred to this database to get a complete overview of what food design is and what the possibilities are. A surplus value is that for an artist active in food design, such a database makes it much easier to reflect on your work and that of others. Inspiration for structuring this kind of web-based database could be found in the BNO-site and *Archinect*.

Immediately ideas for launching such a website entered the conversation. The inner-food designer reared its head when plans came to the table for guerilla-cooking, exhibitions showcasing the possibilities of food design and accompanying events in which the press-folk will be interactively submerged in these possibilities.

All and all, the meeting proved to be a fruitful get-together. After tasting the first bites of food design, these young designers are clearly craving for more. A shared belief in the possibilities of taking a well-deserved future in their own hands might be the beginning for a delicious cooperation within the new generation of food design.

- Rogier Brom

Food and thoughts consumed by:

Anna Brecht | Johanneke van Helden | Winanda Hendriks | Liv Kooijmans | Taiji Masayuki Tajima | Suzanne Rietdijk | Karlijn Souren