

Biting into Time

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You are really hungry, you do not have the energy or the means to go grocery shopping, and there isn't anything in your fridge, what is the last resort? Menemen: a traditional Turkish dish made from eggs, tomato, and green peppers and commonly served with bread. Due to the list of ingredients, it is one of the cheapest dishes in Turkish cuisine, especially made by students in Turkey. Menemen, however, represents much more to the artist Suat Ogut, as in his words, "Anyone who knows me, knows that I love making menemen". This is the statement that has led to the exhibition *The Future of the Me-Mory-nemen*, the love for a dish that represents more than the combination of eggs, tomatoes, pepper (and according to the cook/artist, a pinch of white feta cheese). But what does menemen really signify? It can be seen as the cozy, heart and body warming menu item that brings everyone together. Menemen can be seen as the staple single guy's food, even if you do not have anything in your fridge, you can still concoct one... and it is also definitely a working class dish... The location of the installation in the Jordaan district of Amsterdam, historically a working class neighborhood also fits in perfectly with the working class origins of menemen. Ogut's serendipitous decision of selecting a spot that has no pre-life in art is also noteworthy.

Just as the combination of the ingredients leads to a completely new taste hence a new experience, what Ogut is putting his bite or foot into with *The Future of the Me-Mory-nemen* is a space of encounters. Under one roof, Ogut brings together the familiar and the (un) familiar, for those who already know menemen, the crisp white space will be an unusual setting. As for the ones who get the chance to experience the chairs and the architectural setting, the smell, the cooking, the resulting dish will be unusual layers of the overall experience. The two components of the installation, *cum* menemen production center connect us to the educational centers of Amsterdam. Once frequented by students, and now have been transformed into different functions. The chairs are memory triggers, just as the taste of menemen in your mouth is reminiscent of memories of the past.

It is the desire and the mission of puzzlement that turns Ogut's piece into an ironic self-portrait. Cannot completely let go of the menemen, but also cannot really continue living in a pristine, lab-like space. Can there be a path between the two? Can they indeed be connected/ experienced within the same space? Can one inhabit/embody both simultaneously?

Food is a social metaphor. One can even think about it as a "social sculpture" according to which human interaction, including eating together, is conceived as an art form in itself. One of the most prominent practitioners is Rirkrit Tiravanija, who began cooking and serving food to visitors at galleries, leaving the pots, pans, and dirty dishes in the gallery for the duration of his exhibitions. Hegel notes that

experiencing art (in this case, traditional form of art like paintings and sculptures) only uses two senses, hearing and seeing but “for smell, taste, and touch have to do with matter as such and its immediately sensible quality” therefore subject of food correlates with the direct experience that performative art gives to audiences.¹ “The everyday becomes both an essential constituent of the authenticity of art (the possibility of experiencing life as it is) and an instance not easily locatable as either art or everyday life but suspended between the two, that is, between the entrance into the gallery or exhibition space and the exit onto the street.”²

Ogut creates a site of displacement: the displacement of artistic sites of products, of national identities, of the location and the consumption of art. This gives a sense of dislocation due to seeing and experiencing the unexpected. His work creates stories reflecting the identities of the artist and the institutions represented and performed. Beyond the satisfaction of individual desires, the exchange and consumption of food that structures the installation has a collective significance: to realize how one’s introduction to any culture –in this case, the Netherlands– as a place and set of social customs and mores, often comes through the cooking and exchange and experiencing of food.

The Future of the Me-Mory-nemen brings together different geographical and time zones. Chronos, the ancient Greek word meaning the [chronological](#) or sequential [time](#) and kairos, the right, critical, or opportune moment. While chronos is quantitative, kairos has a qualitative, permanent nature. As Ogut compiles as well as metaphorically and literally cooks together the past, the present and the future in a both domestic and (non)domestic setting, he creates a new authentic space with no previous memory of menemen. He takes hold of an opportune moment and creates fresh experiences and memories.

Fundamentally, it is about the foreigner and foreign spaces. We deal with prejudices with which we construct a picture about others, but we also address the question of how others see us. We also want to know which stereotypes about foreign spaces are still present today, and are there any new ones invented? At the intersection of contemporary art, anthropology and social psychology, Ogut examines an unusual glossary containing the terminology of ‘the other’ – a neighbor, a stranger, a newcomer, or a new dish in front of us. *The Future of the Me-Mory-nemen* recognizes the (black) humor in the perception of ‘us’ and ‘them’. The installation combines the aspects of the cultural study of stereotypes, travelogues, and culinary fiction stemming from menemen through an artistic lens or satire on social landscape(s), fed by myths of lust and obsession with purity and sterility as its main elements. Ogut intertwines cultural codes as he cooks up a yummy and filling dish. All that is left to say is **Bon Appetit** or **Afiyet olsun!**

1" Carolyn Kormeyer (1999) *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy*. Ithaca and London; Cornell University Press cited in Michel Delville (2007) *Food, Poetry, and Aesthetic of Consumption*. ROUTLEDGE; New York.

2" Cecilia Novero (2010) *Antidiets of the Avant-Grade: From Futurist Cooking to Eat Art*. Minnesota; Minnesota Press, 266.