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Food for thought: Berlin Food Art Week

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Anne Duk Hee Jordan is a mad genius. I know because her installation/dinner for Berlin Food Art Week, called “Into the Wild”, at Hallesches Haus, is the kind of installation/dinner only a mad genius could come up with. The table is carpeted with sprouts and plumes of bamboo, evening primrose and lavender. And countless other plants I can’t identify. Vegetables – fat zucchini, tiny beets, fronds of fennel – are

tucked among the leaves. Usually I enter Hallesches Haus as part of a mundane grind, with a laptop under my arm: now, the space looks like something out of a fairy tale. I am seated next to a woman who makes electronic instruments out of vegetables and a Catalan performer who keeps sighing with delight. So the whole effect is a bit otherworldly – in a good way, like entering a primeval forest and finding it filled with intellectual weirdos and kindred spirits.

I am of course secretly praying that we begin to eat the table, and there's a big laugh when Jordan announces that this is our first course: salad. Parsnips, wild mint and marigolds in a lettuce wrap are delicious. We become bolder, eating fat pods of poppy and roasted sweet branches of what I think is maybe birch. We wipe our hands on the cress tablecloth.

Then the meal itself, a tribute to herbs and flowers and other wild things. This meal is the result of a months-long collaboration between Jordan and Andre Noack, who runs Das Herbarium in Leipzig, the garden responsible for this bounty. These kinds of events can feel a bit trendy and superficial, but the commitment of the Herbarium team shows: they have been celebrating off-beat fruits, vegetables, herbs and flowers for 20 years now. We move from sweet African blue basil to the primrose flowers, tart and bracing against a hot-sweet curry. Brennessel soup. Tiny pink quail eggs pickled in beet juice and tarragon. We eat with our hands: the evening is no-waste.

The theme of the biennial Food Art Week this year is Vs. Meat. It might seem pedantic, but the approach of Into the Wild is gentle – it simply imagines and then enacts a lush, green world without meat, one that is diverse and abundant, overflowing with delicious and edible plants. It is the world in which we already live. *Nachtkerze*, the primrose, is one of the most healing herbs Jordan mentions (good for coughs and acne alike) – they grow wild at Gleisdreieck.

But other pieces take a more direct approach on the "against meat" theme... hanging on the wall are photographs from Brazilian artist Ayrson Herclito, this year's Brazil entrant to the Venice Biennale. The photographs juxtapose his human body with the body parts of other commonly consumed animals. In one of the most striking, a cowhide is draped over the shoulder of his subject, the hot iron of a branding mark

sears into the skin. In a light box photograph shot from above titled "Fleischfreude", Kate Hersh Rhee lies on a table, her whole body draped with sliced German meats. The piece references a Japanese practice of eating sushi off of naked women: empty chairs suggest a place for the viewer. But the artist's eyes stare back at the camera, challenging women's bodies' association with consumption and objectification.



FRAU HUE

People are also flesh, if not food, are they not? I attended a performance called, "The Worst Part of Me", presented by artist Frau Hue. I didn't look up any information beforehand, and when I arrived, the first question was "Are you comfortable having blood drawn?" Yes, Frau Hue explained, the piece offered participants the opportunity to prepare and eat blood sausage made with their very own blood. Long story short: one of the most challenging and visceral performances I have ever been a part of. Nine of us, in the end, sat around the table eating our own blood sausage, conversations ranging from our varied seasoning choices to *Soylent Green*, the red

wine flowing. For such a deeply personal, affective performance, it was also a remarkably good time. Many of the participants were vegan, and so we debated at length the ethics and politics of eating your own blood. One lifelong vegetarian scraped her plate clean; I could only manage a few bites. And then I left and went to dinner and we talked about the Christian Eucharist, the prevalence of vampire myths, the nature of disgust. And then other friends discussed the performance the next day. And the day after. Food Art Week is almost over, but I get the sense that the chewy conversations that started there – about sustainability and morality and pop culture and foraging – will continue for a long time.

Berlin Food Art Week runs until July 14 at various venues, see [website](#) for details.