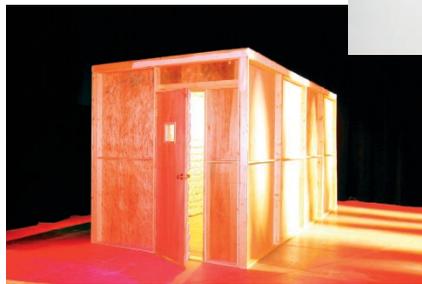




Artist Jennifer Rubell shows off her good taste with her cotton-candy-lined *Padded Cell* (far left) and *Old Fashioned*, an 18-metre wall of doughnuts that visitors noshed on. Sweet!



Pack a fork the next time you visit a gallery opening because there may be more to nibble on than sweaty cheese and stale crackers. These days, performance artists are creating edible artwork that pushes the limits of good taste.

Like your culture hit to pack a sugar buzz? Chomp down on New York-based Jennifer Rubell's sweet art. Her *Padded Cell* was a room made up of 1,600 cones of cotton candy, while *Just Right* invited the audience to join in her "interactive food installation" by customizing their own bowl of porridge (brown sugar and raisins included). Earlier this year, a makeshift summer camp—complete with communal kitchen—was set up in Montreal's Centre Clark. Spectators chilled with Toronto-based artist Dean Baldwin while he served a Super Bowl Sunday feast of chili con carne. Baldwin is known for these kinds of social experiments: He set up both a pop-up restaurant at the Art Gallery of Ontario and a margarita-dispensing fountain called (what else?) *Margaritaville Town Fountain*.

By creating unexpected situations where anything can happen, these works challenge expectations about the typical gallery experience. But while some are meant to be tongue-in-(braised beef)-cheek, others are more difficult to swallow. In an attempt to examine our fraught relationship with food, Montreal's Kim Waldron recently produced a series of photographs documenting her one-month foray into butchery. For the exhibition opening, she roasted a lamb on a spit for visitors.

Using food as an artistic medium in performance art has its precedents, like the dinner-parties-as-happenings during the '60s. But food's comeback as an artistic medium coincides with our current supersize obsession with all things edible—and today's trendy idea that chefs are artists. There's a fine line between the creative genius of chefs like Spain's Ferran Adria, who has been called the "Picasso of the modern kitchen," and artists who describe themselves as "food conceptualizers." What is most appealing about these performances, though, is how accessible they are. As James Beard once said: "Food is our common ground, a universal experience." □

# {ART} CRAFT DINNER

*These days, the way to our ART is through our STOMACHS.*

TEXT: JOANA LOURENCO

## PERFORMANCE ART: THEN AND NOW



**Then** Czech-Canadian artist Jana Sterbak's *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic* (1987). (Salted slabs of beef) x (weeks at the National Gallery of Canada) = SHADY BEEF JERKY



**Now** Lady Gaga's meat dress at the 2010 MTV Video Music Awards. (T-bone steaks) + (red carpet) = RAW TALENT