

'New Shores' Explores the Intermingling of Cultures in Los Angeles

Crystal Duan | October 15, 2019



Current:LA Food is a city-wide triennial presenting art projects by 15 national and international artists and teams, who have taken on the global issue of food. See Current:LA Food all over the 15 council districts of Los Angeles. This article was made in partnership with The City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA) and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (ICA LA). Find out more about Current:LA Food on our coverage [here](#).

Late one Sunday evening in October, as soft music played over the speakers and colored balls of light hovered between the trees, about 40 curious Los Angeles residents gathered at Barnsdall Park.

Seated on large stretches of tarp in this wooded area in the heart of Hollywood, the crowd took in the ethereal atmosphere as the sun began to set. They had gathered tonight to learn about Armenian

culture, a community that had been in L.A. for decades. Before the evening was over, they would hear stories, taste its food for free and see how Armenian and American had gradually co-mingled, giving birth to a culture that added to L.A.'s eclectic beauty.

This was the first of a five-week series, "New Shores: The Future Dialogue Between Two Homelands," highlighting the cuisine of nearby neighborhoods and the immigrant stories that thread them together, explained Julio César Morales, one of the artists who conceptualized the series of events as part of Current:LA Food, the city's triennial.

Held by the city of Los Angeles in Barnsdall Park for five consecutive Sundays, "New Shores" seeks to bring ethnic cultures east of Hollywood and beyond to life. Before the fall is over, guests will be able to explore firsthand cuisines from Thailand, Korea, the Mayans of Mexico and more. They would also be treated to a personal introduction of those cultures by artists with those backgrounds explaining their stories not only through food, but visuals and oral storytelling as well.

Morales and his collaborator exhibition partner Max La Rivière-Hedrick were inspired by the magical realism depicted in Carlos Fuentes' book "The Orange Tree," which describes a central conflict between the Old World and the New World in five novellas. The exhibition's five installments, all taking place in the same place, parallel the format of Fuentes' book and blend the old and new ways in five different vignettes. As time has passed and shapes the neighborhoods and experiences of Los Angeles, Morales and La Rivière-Hedrick wanted to capture the fluidity of these neighborhoods, but also how they influenced each other. Although each day is dedicated to a different culture, sometimes there will be fusion foods or fusion arts that demonstrate how time has merged some of the culture's original ideas, Morales said.



Barnsdall Art Park hosting Current:LA Food's "New Shores" by Max La Rivière-Hedrick and Julio César Morales | Courtesy of the Department of Cultural Affairs, Los Angeles

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“We are so interested in the crossover between neighborhoods,” Morales said. “Such as how, as a kid, my mother was adding different tofu to flour tortillas and making her own fusion food early on because we were so close to other immigrant populations. How sight influences culture also plays a big part of it, because you could walk into a grocery store and see other people’s food and want to use that.”

For Morales and La Rivière-Hedrick, growing up in the U.S. granted them both “extremely valuable bicultural experiences with Latino families.” But now, they are reconciling those aspects of biculturality with the sudden rise in popularity of less-mainstream foods.

As people begin to embrace more ethnic cuisines, do they understand the stories and struggles behind those recipes?

“Now that we’re older, our generation is really wanting to harness and grasp the roots of where our parents came from,” said Morales. “We rub against each other, the old and the new.”

“It’s interesting how, over time, so much in Los Angeles has been changing and so much has also been staying the same,” La Rivière-Hedrick said.



Julio César Morales and Max La Rivière-Hedrick | Courtesy of the Department of Cultural Affairs, Los Angeles

Much of that change centers on the food being a time capsule for the traditions it came from, but also as a way for children who grew up bicultural families are exploring their disparate backgrounds. Some, La Rivière-Hedrick explained, went on to run restaurants their parents started, but the paths diverge from there. If you are a second-generation immigrant kid, you may have made the food of your heritage as faithfully as you could, or you infuse it with something different but market it more intentionally, so people know what they're getting.

On Oct. 6, the first day of the exhibition, it was Armenia's turn to shine.

An Armenian-American poet from the Poetic Research Bureau, Ara Shirinyan, introduced the guests to his first-generation immigrant world through spoken word. For ten minutes, Shirinyan shared the story of Armenians in Los Angeles and how they came to be the biggest population outside of the original country — about six to ten million Armenians in Los Angeles total. Shirinyan recalled being in awe of the diasporas represented in the ethnic supermarkets he grew up going to.

“I wanted to emphasize how a big part of our culture is, how you communicate with people through food,” Shirinyan said. “You can resolve conflict through food, and (I value) talking about these food experiences that are important and how they also connect with what it means to be an Angeleno, and an Armenian.”

Shirinyan’s family moved to L.A. in 1987 when he was ten years old to escape the communist regime in USSR. He grew up fascinated by the Armenian diaspora and some of its Latin influence while in L.A.

As part of his participation in “New Shores,” Shirinyan also made a meal for Morales and La Rivière-Hedrick that inspired the duo to share it with the community: covered pans of fried quail, red lentil salad with Aleppo peppers and lemon juice, along with Tahini bread and walnut preserves.

The quail, fried in a manner like chicken, was inspired by Shirinyan getting creative in the grocery store not too long ago when he saw the bird and knew he had to give it a shot.



Fried quail served at Current:LA Food's "New Shores" by Max La Rivière-Hedrick and Julio César Morales | Courtesy of the Department of Cultural Affairs, Los Angeles

His meal wasn't the only Armenian food promoted at the event.

Arthur Grigoryan, another Armenian-American, talked about his pop up backyard barbecue, “Ill Mas BBQ,” which was a Texas-Armenian blend that he’d perfected.

Grigoryan explained that the food, which he gives out about once a month at an undisclosed location, is basturma brisket, a type of cured beef, and added spices such as paprika and the Greek herbs fennel, but then smoked it for 20 hours in the Texan style of barbecuing.

“My inspiration comes from the Byzantine soldiers,” he said, referencing the ancient Armenian era, a wartime in which soldiers would salt meats and strap them onto their saddles as they rode to war. “I host these events at my family home and share what I’ve created with people. It was like creating something that represents me — because I’m not just Armenian, I’m also American, and I like Texas barbecue.”

Anyone interested in trying Grigoryan’s recipe was encouraged to follow his social media presence to find out where he would be serving it.

“Bridging the gaps is really important,” La Rivière-Hedrick said. “Our journeys are so colorful, and we want to really convey how being an immigrant is like existing between two shores that you *could* belong to, but you’re aware of how much you don’t.”

In later weeks, the pair will also tackle other Asian cultures and bring in more performances that can fully convey the diversity that has come in so extensively.

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