

CURRENT:LA

Palms Park Transforms Into a Fast Food Playground

October 22, 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.

Lounging on checkered picnic blankets at Palms Park, young families and art enthusiasts soaked in the warm rays while breathing in the scent of fresh foliage. This small crowd was waiting patiently with binoculars at their side for a performance that is part of Current:LA, the citywide triennial.

That day, everyone perked up when they saw little, colorful figures bobbing in the distance. With the help of binoculars, they could see a pizza slice adorned with pepperoni, mushroom, bell pepper, olives sauntering toward the stage with a wide smile. Following the happy pizza slice was a cupcake dressed in an emerald liner and a cherry helmet on top. A red pack of French fries, a crunchy shell meat taco and theatre-style popcorn filled in the rest of the fast food cast.

Wearing a billowy red and white checkered picnic blanket with a “Plately” mask, artist Ry Rocklen resembled the narrator of a Greek tragedy with his long, curly brown locks swaying in the breeze. His sidekick, Shadey, welcomed the Food Group with instrumental chords.

“We are what you desire, we are what you have been dreaming of,” the Food Group announced their arrival to the audience. Having lumbered in from Palm Park’s “mouth” to its “belly” at center stage, the performers struggled to move under the weight and girth of their fast food costumes. Born from metal and machine, the Food Group declared how powerful they were. Their slow and cumbersome nature conflicted with their mighty declarations of power. The irony drew the audience in with amusement and at the same time let them grasp the absurdity of letting fast food have undue influence over society. The Food Group engaged the audience with pun-laden humor and melodious singing against ominous instrumental chords. The French fries left the audience gasping for air with his cheesy “ketchup” pun and being “ahead of the snack.” The original theme song, “I Don’t Need No Fork,” was a real earworm leaving the audience singing long after the performance ended.



"The Food Group" by Ry Rocklen at Current:LA Food performance in Palms Park | Courtesy of the Department of Cultural Affairs

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See the characters of Ry Rocklen's world in this slideshow. Click left or right below:



Ry Rocklen performs as part of "The Food Group" at Current:LA Food performance in Palms Park | Courtesy of the Department of Cultural Affairs



As a sculptural artist, Rocklen endorses the hyper familiar in a whimsical, surreal fashion. He breathes new life into the mundane to recast them in the limelight and be seen with fresh eyes. Having grown up with fast food in and around him, Rocklen has a deeply personal connection to these handheld foods. In this performance, Rocklen wants to celebrate these food items, which are so iconic they each merit their own emoji symbol. His inspiration comes from Claes Oldenburg, who creates art from everyday objects, but in a scale that is larger than life.

Rocklen's "The Food Group: Genesis," on the other hand, is a collection of miniature sculptures of Food Group — like Oldenburg but in reverse. Originally, these fast food items were supposed to be only subjects of an Oldenburg-like project, but the lively costumes inspired Rocklen to produce a theatrical production.

Standing in front of the audience, the pizza slice announced that they were there to carry out orders of Mr. Pillowman. This was an allusion to Rocklen's previous work, Mr. Pillowman, a giant made of pillows whose original purpose was to wear Rocklen's 16-foot-tall T-shirt. Now the giant played another role, the creator of Food Group. He hears us in our dreams and sends Food Group to fulfill our deep desire for them. An Ojai Pixie tangerine makes an entrance towards the end, satiating the desire of the audience to have something better than fast food.

After their farewell to the audience, Food Group turned to the picnic table next to them and paid final respects to the "Uneaten Lunch," a hamburger, a pickle, a soda can and French fries cast in bronze. The audience came up to touch the "Uneaten Lunch." "This is neat!" exclaimed a young girl. Notably, the fast food in the "Uneaten Lunch" is depicted solely by men.



Uneaten Lunch consists of a hamburger, a pack of French fries, a soda can and a pickle cast in bronze. They will be available for viewing until Nov. 3 at Palms Park, Tuesday, Oct. 1, 2019. | AP Photo/Ry Rocklen

“It’s the end of the Old Guard Patriarchy, the reign of the white male”, Rocklen explained, “it is symbolic in the way of the patriarchy of food, but also diminished at the same time.” Women are traditionally objectified in the sculptural world of art, he explained, but now Rocklen was objectifying the men instead.

In staging this performance, Rocklen wanted the audience to walk away with is a deeper consciousness and to see the world more vividly. “I want them to be able to have the world around them to slow down. After the performance to look down on their plate and see different, eat slow and relish the flavor more intently,” he said.

Watch more performances of "Food Group: The Body Palms" Sundays, 4-5 p.m. through November 3, 2019. Plan your Current:LA visit using this complete guide.

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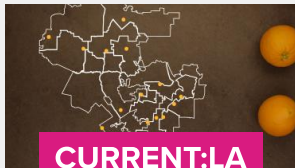
Top Photo: "The Food Group: Genesis" displayed at Honor Fraser Gallery, Los Angeles. | AP Photo/Ry Rocklen

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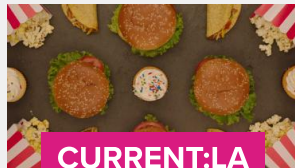
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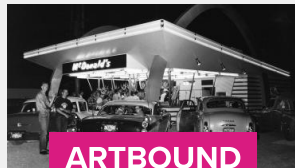
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