

GLADSTONE GALLERY

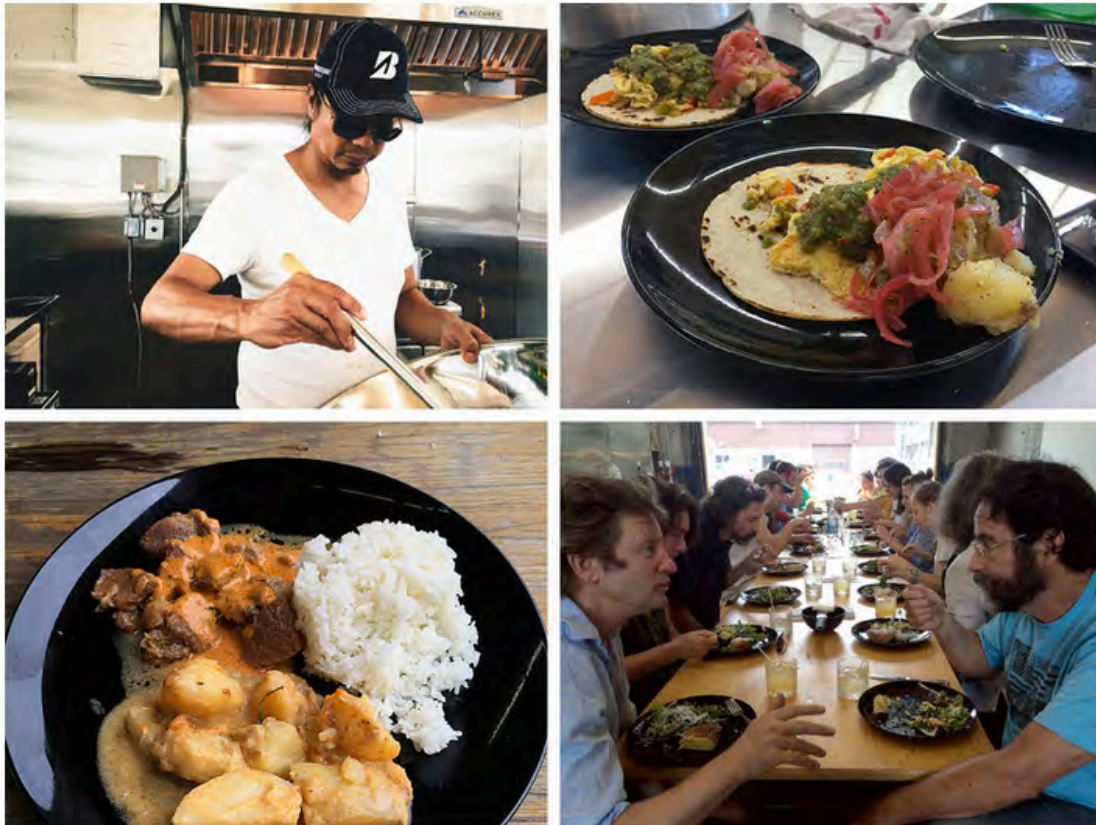
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A Restaurant Where Art is on the Menu

Food Matters

By KAT HERRIMAN NOV. 13, 2015



Clockwise from top left: the artist Rirkrit Tiravanija cooking at his new restaurant Unclebrother; a Thai omelette taco with pickled onions and salsa verde; dinner at Unclebrother; Thai panang curry.

In 1992, the art dealer Gavin Brown helped the artist Rirkrit Tiravanija transform 303 Gallery, then on Greene Street, into an operational kitchen for a part performance, part installation piece titled "Untitled (Free)." The seminal solo show, which found the artist serving up gratis curry and rice out of the converted gallery, represented a critical development in Tiravanija's practice. It also marked the beginning of his friendship with Brown, who at the time worked as an assistant at the gallery. Now in the collection of MoMA, "Untitled (Free)" — considered a masterwork of relational aesthetics — was the first of many interactive projects realized by the twosome. Their latest scheme: a gallery-meets-kitchen in Hancock, N.Y. Lovingly referred to as Unclebrother (the name is an inside joke), the hybrid restaurant revives the generous spirit of Tiravanija and Brown's inaugural partnership, but adds in a full-time, brick-and-mortar locale. "It's the first time he's had a commercial kitchen, so it's a departure in that sense," Brown says. "It's a natural progression, in a way. It's about entering into the same place but from a different direction."

GLADSTONE GALLERY

A three-hour drive from New York, Unclebrother's inception sprang out of a real-estate opportunity in the rural upstate farm community — a longtime summer retreat for both the artist and the dealer. "It all happened very quickly; we acted on instinct," says Tiravanija, who has also been working on opening a space in the city. "I am always interested in this idea of bringing art closer to life. This space provided a way to make this economically feasible." He and Brown hope the gutted exhibition hall, formerly a car dealership, will serve as a gathering place for locals as well as fair-weather tourists. Rooted in the pre-existing agricultural community, Unclebrother operates like a site-specific work, engaging the native landscape as well as the culture. "When we started, we met all these artists and designers who had moved from the West Village and started farms," the artist says. "It's great to be able to tap into these social infrastructures."

Tiravanija and Brown aren't the only cooks in the kitchen: Assistants and guest chefs will do most of the cooking, spicing up the menu with personal touches. For the soft opening last summer, Brown matched works by artists like Joan Jonas and Sal Scarpitta with Tiravanija's rotating assortment of dishes made from seasonal ingredients. "I think of the kitchen as a lab or a workshop," explains Tiravanija of his approach to cooking. "It's more about the process than the product."

Currently on break for the winter, Brown and Tiravanija are already plotting Unclebrother's spring relaunch, with a goal of being open every weekend. Their summer of experimenting helped them develop a program that will include a residency and a rotating lineup of artists and chefs. "It seems as though the center of things has become a little claustrophobic. The margins provide more flexibility and opportunity," explains Brown, who has also recently opened exhibition spaces in Rome and the bottom floor of his Harlem townhouse. "With Hancock, nothing was forced. The space came about organically and has given us a platform to try something new." Recipes for Unclebrother's Bastard Pad Thai and Nam Pla Ice Cream follow here.

Bastard Pad Thai

Yield: 4 servings

To make the traditional pad thai:

1 tablespoon chopped garlic
6 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 teaspoon chili powder, preferably Thai (or cayenne pepper)
4 tablespoons palm sugar
4 tablespoons tamarind purée
½ cup chopped, roasted peanuts
1 block firm tofu or, if possible, smoked tofu, diced into small cubes
1.5 ounces preserved turnip, finely chopped
1.5 ounces Chinese chives
3 tablespoons fish sauce
1.5 ounces of pork loin, diced into small pieces
10 ounces rice vermicelli noodles (sen lek)
3 eggs
1 pound of bean sprouts
1 lime

GLADSTONE GALLERY

To turn the dish into a bastard (optional):*

Béchamel sauce with cheese (recipe below)

Breadcrumbs and butter to top

Ketchup and mustard to serve

1. In a wok, stir-fry the garlic in 3 tablespoons of the vegetable oil. Add the chili powder, palm sugar and tamarind purée. Stir in well to mix and melt the sugar.
2. Add to the mixture 2 tablespoons of the chopped peanuts, tofu, preserved turnip, Chinese chives and fish sauce, then the diced pork, and stir until the pork is cooked.
3. Add remaining oil and softened noodles to the mixture. Stir and turn the noodles into the sauce until the noodles are well coated.
4. In the middle of the wok (and noodles), add 3 eggs and stir them to scramble, then stir and fry the mixture of eggs onto the noodles until all the egg liquid is cooked. Remove from heat.
5. Top with the remaining chopped peanuts, stirring them into the noodle mixture.
6. Let it all set for few minutes.
Once you've made the pad thai, you can serve directly, with a garnish of raw bean sprouts and slices of lime to squeeze over the noodles — or turn the dish into a bastard, using béchamel sauce with cheese and the instructions below. (The bastard recipe can also be done with leftover pad thai or cooked a day in advance.
7. Put the pad thai in a casserole dish. Cover with the béchamel sauce and mix until the noodles are completely covered.
8. In a separate pan, fry the breadcrumbs with a generous amount of butter until light golden brown and sprinkle over the casserole. Bake at 350 degrees for around 30 minutes.
9. Serve with bean sprouts on top and the lime, ketchup and mustard on the side.

***Béchamel sauce with cheese**

5 cups fresh milk

½ cup butter

4 tablespoons all-purpose flour

Thai chilies

salt to taste

½ cup grated mild Cheddar cheese

1. Melt the butter in a saucepan. Add flour to make a roux and let it cook on medium heat for couple of minutes.
2. Add heated milk slowly, constantly stirring.
3. Add ¼ of a red or green bird's-eye chili. Let the sauce cook for 10-20 minutes until the consistency of a thick cream.
4. Add the grated cheese.

Nam Pla Ice Cream

Yield: 8-10 servings

2 cups thick cream

6 cups milk

1 ¼ cup sugar

GLADSTONE GALLERY

12 large egg yolks
fish sauce to taste

1. Combine the eggs and sugar in a bowl; stir in cream and milk.
2. Heat the mixture gently until it reaches 180 degrees, which can be done in a hot water bath. Then pour in a bowl on ice to cool it down.
3. When cold, add fish sauce to taste. Churn in an ice cream machine.

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