

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Gisela Williams, "The Professional Pop-Up Artist," *T: The New York Times Style Magazine*, July 26, 2016



The Professional Pop-Up Artist

Food Matters | By GISELA WILLIAMS JULY 26, 2016



Dalad Kambhu (left) and Rirkrit Tiravanija. Credit: Courtesy of Dottir

On a recent summer evening in Berlin, the artist Rirkrit Tiravanija and the former model and self-trained cook Dalad Kambhu, both from Thailand, were cooking in the professional kitchen and HQ of Freunde von Freunden, a Berlin-based design blog. The two friends were happily tweaking Thai recipes by replacing traditional ingredients with local staples to make dishes like jungle venison curry, a green papaya salad that used kohlrabi rather than young papaya and a glass noodle salad with smoked trout. They ended up with about a dozen dishes for their two-week-long pop-up restaurant that opened today at Dottir, a Nordic dining room in the Mitte borough of Berlin. They will take the place of Dottir's young chef Victoria Eliasdottir (the half sister of the likewise culinarily inclined artist Olafur Eliasson, who has his own cookbook); she will be cooking in Hong Kong for the next two weeks.

Food has been a consistent medium for Tiravanija since his first solo show at Manhattan's Paula Allen Gallery in the early '90s, when he served pad thai to guests. Sharing meals with strangers in unexpected venues has been a way for the collaborative artist to express an important theme in his work: the communal. In 2010, he came out with a cookbook called "Just Smile Don't Talk," which doubled as a catalog of dishes served at his installations. "I'm not a chef," the artist says. "I'm interested in using food as a platform for other ideas, for different interactions and relationships."

GLADSTONE GALLERY



Courtesy of Dottir

Lately, though, Tiravanija has been involved in more traditional pop-up restaurants. Last summer at Art Basel in Switzerland, he collaborated with the architects Nikolaus Hirsch and Michel Müller to create a bamboo structure in Basel's public Messeplatz, where the Finnish chef Antto Melasniemi used food products that would otherwise have gone to waste to create Thai dishes with a Finnish twist. Guests could help in the kitchen, serve food — and even determine what they would pay. Around the same time, Tiravanija collaborated with the gallerist Gavin Brown and a rotating mix of friends to cook up meals in a former garage in upstate New York. The food was “about local produce and availability,” Tiravanija says.

At Dottir, he says, it is simply about “making good food and good atmosphere.” The project came about without a business plan, and even perhaps under the influence of cocktails: Kambhu recalls she first met Tiravanija a few years back at the Grill Royal, a fashionable steakhouse and watering hole (the Berlin framer Stephen Landwehr helped open the restaurant in 2007, with the proceeds from selling a Peter Doig painting for 1.5 million euros). “It was my first visit to Berlin, and it was a cold and gray day,” Kambhu says. “I went to the Grill and met a bunch of cool artists, one of whom was Rirkrit. I've been told that it was Olafur Eliasson that introduced us.” Kambhu describes Tiravanija, who brought her to cook at Gavin Brown's space last summer, as a brother and a mentor. “Then I came to Berlin with him, and we thought, ‘Why don't we do something here?’”

Kambhu hints that the Berlin pop-up might lead to a longer-lasting brick-and-mortar space in the German capital, saying simply, “There is more room here to experiment and create.” And Tiravanija concurs: “Perhaps,” he says, “it's inching toward something more permanent.”