

***MEDIA*LAB**

LAB#02 The Metabolic Sublime

COOKING EARTH WORKSHOP

Black Almanac presents: COOKING EARTH at Medialab-Matadero

Black Almanac

Black Almanac is a speculative design-research platform that sees artificiality, alienation, and desire as key ingredients in the transformation of the global food system. Initiated in 2020 by Philip Maughan, Andrea Provenzano, and Nikolai Medvedenko, the project brings together concepts, tools, case studies, and people for whom equitable, nutritious, ecologically sustainable and joyful cuisine is the minimum viable requirement for food in the century to come.

Philip Maughan

Philip Maughan is a writer and researcher from the UK. He covered the infamous “horse meat scandal” while working as a journalist in London, and returned to the subject of food logistics later while participating in The Terraforming program at Strelka Institute. He has worked for current affairs and culture magazines, his freelance writing explores food history, philosophy of technology, and astrobiology.

Andrea Provenzano

Andrea Provenzano is an imager maker and researcher from Italy. After training as a mechanical engineer he switched to documentary photography, and has recently expanded his practice to include algorithmic and computer-generated images, as in Black Almanac's Other Gardens: Visions of Agriculture Beyond Earth. He is based in the Arctic region of Finnmark.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK + SEMINAR DESCRIPTION

The food research platform Black Almanac operates on the assumption that humans have barely begun to exploit the full spectrum of possibilities for energy and matter that might be understood as “food.” Far from it. In fact, we argue that it is the repetition of a limited repertoire of cultural, culinary, technological and agricultural techniques that is the primary cause of widespread ecological damage suffered in the name of feeding.

In 12,000 years of agricultural time, human beings have cooked both dishes and the landscapes that produce them. We cook the Earth in order to feed ourselves and now the Earth is cooking us. And yet the route towards a viable, equitable, sustainable food system will still require “cooking” – not only of new and currently alien foods, but of the infrastructures, knowledge, and institutions that will drive this transformation.

Over three workshops at Medialab-Matadero between 17-21 October, plus a field trip, dinner, and public discussion, we will invite participants and guest speakers to reassess the past, present, and future of food. From precision agriculture to synthetic fats, perverse government subsidies to soil ecology, flavour science and liberation from or by food – the

topic is endlessly complex and often controversial, clouded by subjective intuition and pastoral nostalgia.

To this end we will be joined by chefs, designers, artists, engineers, philosophers, physicists and chemists to question everyday anxieties about what we eat and where it comes from. We will expose hidden blockages holding back change, and imagine food futures that do not presently exist, recognising that while kitchens are domestic laboratories, so too is the food system at large, a metabolic realm where culture steers chemistry, and vice versa.

WHO IS IT TARGETED TO (potential audiences)

We welcome applications from anyone who eats – but those with a defined role or research interest related to food are especially welcome. We would also like to know what skills you might bring to the workshop – be that as a designer, writer, artist, scientist, chef, programmer or entrepreneur – as participants will work towards a final outcome that incorporates the group's findings to make them accessible to others.

DETAILED SCHEDULE

17.10.22

Place: Nave 17 “El espacio”

Description

Cooking Earth Workshop 001: The Past

During the first workshop we will introduce Black Almanac and get to know each other. The session will feature lectures from food historian Rachel Laudan and geographer Nikos Katsikis – on guilt, operational landscapes, and the evolution of society's attitudes towards the food system. The session will aim to lay a historical and material foundation for thinking about contemporary culinary anxieties – where they come from, why they persist, and what might be gained by reexamining some commonly held beliefs.

WIP Timetable:

16:00 Introduction to the theme, who we are

16:20 Who are you, introduce yourself and answer a food question e.g. What is the most evil food in the supermarket, what is the most virtuous, and why lol

17:00 Rachel Laudan on guilt

18:30 Break

18:45 Nikos Katsikis on the cooked globe

19:15 Therapy session: words on whiteboard

19:45 Homework / review, what's coming next: (produce a food diary diary with some kind of qualitative element TBD posted to anonymous link)

Guest speaker: Nikos Katsikis, Rachel Laudan

18.10.22

Description

Food Routes/Roots

Food has conditioned the shape of cities, organizing the spaces and functioning of urban dynamics, the nomenclature of public space and even the way they are inhabited. It imperceptibly shapes the landscape of our streets and moulds the distant territories on which we depend to feed ourselves. In this walk we will explore the past (vestiges, memory...), the present (disputed spaces) and the future (initiatives that point towards alternative food systems), revealing the invisible relationships between the city and food in Madrid.

19.10.22

Place: Nave 17 "El espacio"

Description

Cooking Earth Workshop 002: The Present

The second workshop will open with a presentation on some of the major obstacles to food system transformation in the present. We will then hold a Zoom discussion with Sean Raspet (a chemist and artist) and Lucy Chinen (a food writer and historian) on flavour science. After a break we will sample prototypes prepared by astrophysicist and head chef Susanne Tobler and computer scientist Remo Gisi, reappropriating the corporate focus group as a medium for creative production.

WIP Timetable:

16:00 Presentation on present + neurogastronomy + neophobia

17:00 Lucy Chinen and Sean Raspet on the end and beginning of flavor

18:30 Break

18:45 TasteLab intro and focus groups

19:45 Regroup and finish

Guest Speaker: Sean Raspet, Lucy Chinen, Susanne Tobler, Remo Gisi

21.10.22

Place: Nave 17 "El espacio"

Description

Cooking Earth Workshop 003: The Future

Our final workshop will explore future food systems – with a talk by engineer Juan García Martínez on industrial food production and workable responses to catastrophic events. This workshop will introduce the counterfactual history of factory-kitchens and the role of food in science fiction, video games and art. Together we will speculate on urban-scale models for production, processing and feeding to be published by Medialab-Matadero on the conclusion of The Metabolic Sublime.

16:00 Presentation on factory-kitchens and BA's fantasy factory-kitchen (too functional to exist)

17:00 Juan GM on disasters and industrial production

18:30 Break

18:45 Presentation on food in art, games and science-fiction (dystopian visions of food production at scale, what would the utopians have thought, a cosmist dining hall? What happens when these infrastructures are scaled to planet-size, Other Gardens)

19:15 10 groups of 3 people, mixing skills, making plans – contributions to be published by Matadero deposited in BA's drop box before end of the month

Performance with Fondo and workshop participants

Guest speakers: Juan García Martínez