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# When Art and Food Unite

*Restaurants and Galleries Bring a New Appreciation to the Dining Experience*

By JEMIMA SISSONS



Damien Hirst, 2012

Damien Hirst's work features at London's Tramshed

At an opening party at the Cock 'n' Bull Gallery in East London, the throng of hip gallery goers sip Nyetimber and devour mini fish-finger burgers, while perusing the eclectic collection of art hanging on the walls. But the art isn't the sole reason they've come to this

elegant brick building on Rivington Street; an equally big draw is the chicken and steak feast taking place in the restaurant upstairs.

Tramshed ([chickenandsteak.co.uk](http://chickenandsteak.co.uk)), which opened in May, is the most recent offering from English chef Mark Hix to put art center stage. Looming over the diners is a vast, specially commissioned Damien Hirst artwork—one of his iconic cows in formaldehyde, with a cockerel for company. "Restaurants are a great medium for art if you get it right," says Mr. Hix, who curated much of the artwork at Mayfair restaurant Scott's and at his Soho restaurant, Hix. "If there's a connection and story behind the work, that is. You cannot just go shopping for art. I am friends with the artists, so it helps. They've chosen the piece, with a good story attached to it."



Volker Kreidler

The 'Where the Wild Things Are' exhibition by Artists Anonymous at Berlin's Zagreus Projekt

There has long been an association between art and restaurants. Many of the Post-Impressionist painters would famously pay for their meals in paintings, and restaurants such as the Colombe d'Or ([www.la-colombe-dor.com](http://www.la-colombe-dor.com)) in Provence have walls filled with offerings from impoverished and hungry artists. "Picasso and Miró ate there and it still exists as a restaurant showing art works, which, when they were given to the owner of the Colombe d'Or, were probably worth rather less than a good bowl of coq au vin," says art critic Rachel Campbell-Johnston. "They would now buy you a whole vineyard, or chicken farm for that matter."

Mr. Hirst says it is a natural symbiosis. "Whenever I've made any money I've always celebrated with food—great meals in great restaurants," the English artist says. "A lot of my good friends are chefs. I believe that anything done well is art, and great food is like great art but without the evidence."

Italian-born Valeria Napoleone, who collects the work of only female artists and holds regular dinners for friends including David Hockney and designer Tom Dixon, has just written the recipe book "Valeria Napoleone's Catalogue of Exquisite Recipes," on the relationship between art and food. The two, she says, go hand in hand. "All the openings are followed by dinners," she says. "[Food] is very much a presence in the art world... Artists have always gotten together over a meal. Food as art, however, requires a lot of talent."



SushiSamba

Art at SushiSamba

The boundaries between gallery and restaurant are increasingly becoming blurred. Some restaurants have employed artists in residence, who are curating whole restaurants, cutlery included. Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva at Pied à Terre ([pied-a-terre.co.uk](http://pied-a-terre.co.uk)), a Michelin-starred restaurant in Fitzrovia, last year made works out of leftovers of food such as quail bones and scallop skirts.

Earlier this year, Mourad Mazouz, whose restaurants include Derrière in Paris and Sketch in London, asked Turner Prize-winner Martin Creed to redesign the gallery restaurant in Sketch ([sketch.uk.com](http://sketch.uk.com)). A new

artist will be picked each year, given free rein to redesign the entire room, down to every last chair and teaspoon. "If the art works, it works," Mr. Mazouz says. "In the kitchen we are creating art every day, but it is ephemeral art."

Meanwhile, Pied à Terre will open an exhibition Oct. 2, called "Restoration," by Anna M.R. Freeman, its second artist in residence, a position chosen by a team of curators every eight months. Ms. Freeman has painted large-scale pieces of the room and the diners. "The artists in residence are invited to come into the restaurant and be as much a part of it as they want," says owner David Moore. "Artists bring something different to food."

To capture that inspiration, James Cahill from the Sadie Coles gallery will offer Saturday morning art tours beginning Oct. 6 at three Caprice Holdings Ltd.



Ed Reeve

The interior of Sketch

restaurants—Scott's, 34 and Le Caprice (£10 fee; [le-caprice.co.uk/art-tours](http://le-caprice.co.uk/art-tours)). "It is rather like a backstage tour of the theater," Mr. Cahill says.

Berlin's Zagreus Projekt ([zagreus.net](http://zagreus.net)), a gallery in which dinners are held, invites an artist each year to use the space as he wishes. One year, Karl Heinz Jeron gave all diners headphones that played the diary of a patient with borderline personality disorder. The four words most commonly occurring were branded onto the food. The next exhibition, which opens Oct. 10, is a little lighter. Russian artist Volker Kreidler will install

food-related videos into the space. "People come into the exhibition and eat. The duty of the artists is to make a relation between space, table and food," says founder Ulrich Krauss.

"Everyone can react differently in that situation. Food is not art but a handicraft, yet in this space it can become art."

Pret A Diner ([pretadiner.com](http://pretadiner.com)), which organizes pop-up events, has held dinners curated by artists across Europe, from Munich to Monaco. At one dinner last year in Berlin, set up by K.P. Kofler, artists turned an old coin factory into an aviary. This year, they have turned the Senate rooms in London's Royal Academy into a temporary restaurant, the Burlington Social Club, with neon art by Olivia Steele.

Increasingly, different forms of art are being used. SushiSamba ([sushisamba.com](http://sushisamba.com)), which blends Japanese, Brazilian and Peruvian cuisine, uses street artists to design all its restaurants around the world. It now holds an annual art show, Graffiti Gone Global, which runs parallel to Art Basel Miami Beach. For its latest opening in London in July, SushiSamba asked São Paulo street artist Flip to paint the murals inside the restaurant. "We were looking for influences from the favelas," says owner Shimon Bokovza.

Marlon Abela, who owns three restaurants and a private members' club in London, including the Greenhouse in Mayfair, and has an extensive collection of art that ranges from Julian Opie to Gary Hume, believes that ultimately the art can shape the dining experience: "I guess there are two approaches," says Mr. Abela. "Art can complement the restaurant, or it can be a feature. I always feel that art brings another dimension—it creates a talking point."

**Write to** Jemima Sissons at [wsje.weekend@wsj.com](mailto:wsje.weekend@wsj.com)

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