

CONTEMPLATE

By Phoebe

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SEASONAL GREETINGS

CARAMELIZED ONION & ZAATAR KOMBU CUSTARD
OYSTER MUSHROOM BITE / CURED YOLK & THAI BASIL CRUMBLE
SHIITAKE, WOOD-EAR & MOREL TOFU ROULADE

Local Crops, Cultural Marrying, Seasonal Relishes, Timeless Minds

FISHLESS OCEAN

PERSIMMON CRUDO / GRANNY SMITH / WHITE-KIMCHIED RADISHES / TOGARASHI CANDIED WALNUTS

*Aquatic Relishes From the Soil; As Choices Lead To A
Conglomeration of Outcomes, Hypotheses and Realities Merge.*

SYMBIOTIC SOIL

SPICED SHAOXING CARROTS / CARROT LEAVES & FENNEL SALSA MACHA / CHESTNUTS / TAHINI YOGURT

*The Dynamic Communities of Microbiomes In the Soil Is An Extremely
Magnified Reflection of the Heterogeneity within Homo Sapiens.*

FESTIVE EXPENDITURES

CRANBERRY GOCHUJANG CABBAGE / COUS COUS PILAF / SMOKED SCALLION AIOLI / DOCHI CHILI CRISP DUKKHA

*Beneath Cozy Festival Lights and Lustrous Ornaments,
Manufactured Vessels of Fleeting Joy Combust Layer by Layer...*

MINDFUL DECADENCE

CREAMY TOFU, BEETROOT & BLACK GARLIC EMULSION / SOBA / PICKLED MUSHROOMS / BEET CHIPS

*The Latin Root of Decadence Means to Fall, Deteriorate, and Decay. Today,
Decadence Equates to Luxury, Extravagance, and Richness. Where Even Is the
Line? After All, They Have Emulsified Into Vehement, Desires, and Agitation.*

FLORAL FLUORESCENCE

ROSE & PLUM JELLY / DRUNKEN APPLES / BALSAMIC HONEY / FROZEN FETA

*Fluorescent Materials Cease to Glow As the Radiation Source Stops; Floral Particles
Cease to Perfume Their Surrounding Space As They Diffuse. Through Time.
Regardless, Reminiscence Takes Place With Contemplation, Empathy, and Faith.*

GOLDEN ACCORDION

MISO HONEY BUTTER SWEET POTATO / GINGER-CARDAMOM TUILE / SALTED YOLK ORANGE COCONUT WHIP

*Tranquility Is Not Silence. The Accordion Elicits Euphony and Peace
Through Tender Waves; Layers of Delicate Sweetness Intertwined with
Savory Piquancy Embody the Inexplicable Magic of Vivacious Stillness.*

EATERS' CONUNDRUM

I enjoy all kinds of food, but my typical week of eats mostly consists of home-cooked plant-forward meals. Despite seemingly adhering to the guidelines of sustainable eating, I am still in constant dilemma.

Should I walk to Trader Joe's and buy "accessible" tofu wrapped in plastic, or should I travel to the Asian store—emitting additional CO2—and purchase in bulk? Yes, tofu is vegan, but is it even "sustainable" given that its production is linked to biodiversity loss? Yet, soy is such a quintessential part of Chinese cuisine; how could I relinquish a part of my cultural identity even upon discovering some truths about what I grew up eating?

The fact that I am able to think about these choices reminds me of how privileged I am. As an individual comfortably extracting from the food system crawled with socioeconomic and environmental inequities, having a conversation about choices and the cultural significance of food feels miraculous. It is a true blessing to craft and enjoy food not only for nourishment but also for pleasure, exploring cultural narratives, and building communities.

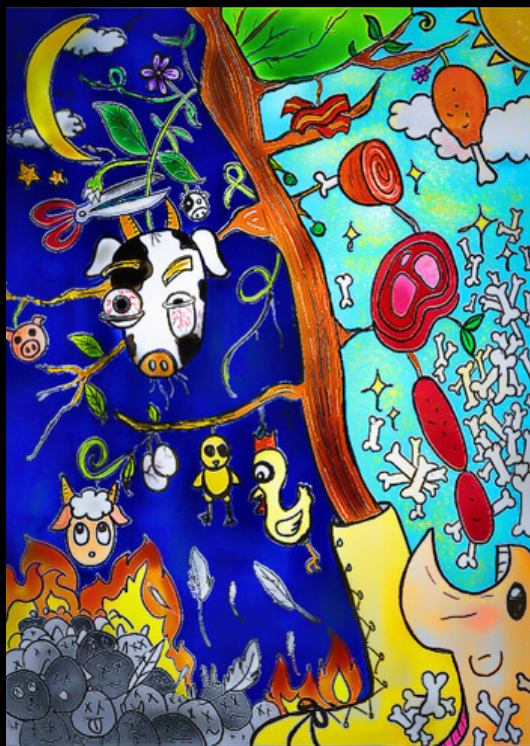
Instead of denying my lens of privilege, I wanted to embrace it and reconnect with my passion for cooking food. More importantly, I hope to bring some meaningful discourse to the table (quite literally).

written by: Phoebe
artwork: Phoebe

WARPED APPETITE



Many of us do not have capacity to dedicate resources to complex decisions around food. Even when we do, our perception, preferences, behavior—even desires—could alter under the illusion of free choice fabricated by deceptive marketing and asymmetric information.



CELEBRATING DEPLETION

This drawing doesn't aim to preach for the termination of animal suffering; it simply calls out the normalized negligence and detachment with reality. Fun fact, the cleanly packaged chicken breasts in grocery stores come from a whole bird with its necessary feathers, joints, and guts. And they obviously do not grow on trees.

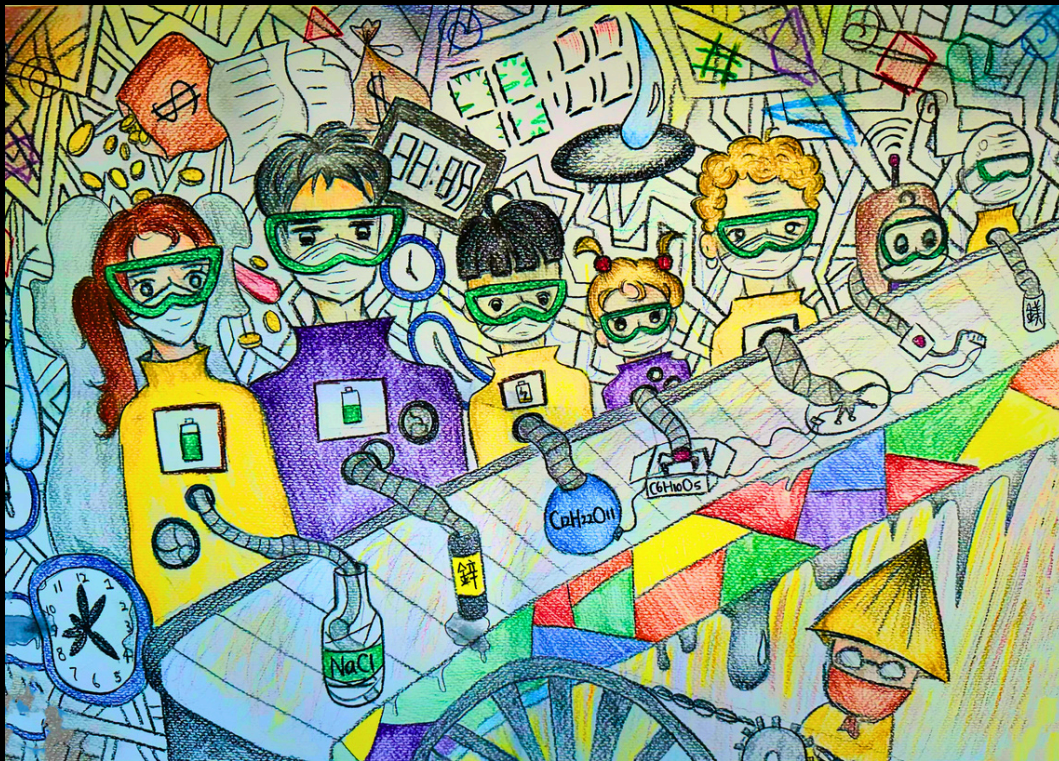
Firstly, I hope to soften the dichotomy between cleanliness and Epicureanism. Oftentimes, fulfillment is associated with lavishness, but I believe in craftsmanship that reimagines and encourages pleasant yet conscious consumption. By no means am I trying to establish “sustainable haute cuisine” or coin another flashy terminology on my unexceptional idea. Yet, I aspire to create food that story-tell and elicit contemplation on the working hands, minds, and ecosystems behind each intentional bite of Nature's gift.

Secondly, advocacies for locality, seasonality, and plant-centrism foster a sense of romanticism that prescribes what constitutes Sustainable & Healthy. Despite these values being well-grounded, they aren't attainable for many of us. Meanwhile, what's considered vogueish greenery in one space could have been practiced inconspicuously in another. Understandings of agriculture, ecosystems, and natural phenomena evolved from global communities throughout countless generations. However, most conversations today explore a limited narrative that magnifies the gastronomic fantasy of Eurocentrism. As a self-taught cook, my journey was sparked by mainstream culinary media predominantly featuring Western ingredients and practices. I subconsciously allow the image of sun-soaked continental produce in artisanal marketplaces to shape my perception of wholesomeness and integrity. The truth is, fermenting Chinese mustard greens to preserve them at their peak season is not any less upstanding than harvesting a fresh tomato from its vine in the summery Sicilian fields. Seaweed is now celebrated in modern cuisines as a progressive superfood that sequesters carbon; however, this humble algae has been consumed in Japan for over 2000 years.

Don't get me wrong. I am definitely not qualified nor intending to criticize any food culture nor demonize any culinary approach. It is indisputable that haute cuisine and modern fine-dining have spotlighted and popularized many underrepresented yet valuable cultural ingredients. Regardless, bits of colored fairy dust gets sprinkled here and there, yet the main storytellers never changed. When can we truly escape the interplay between cultural power dynamics and normative food values? Culture is a big part of food, but it should not be used as a weapon or an anesthetic drug. Thus, this menu is not defined by ethnic bounds; instead, it celebrates cultural bridges and--beyond culture--our experiences. The whimsicality of "fine-dining" (I really dislike this word), the liberty of home-cooking, the rawness of the living world, nostalgia from homeland, and anticipation for the future. I make food with homage to my roots—not just where I'm from but more importantly, what I believe in and what we share in common.

If you look at the names and descriptions of each dish, you will see that over the course of the menu, we progress from the natural to the material, then the spiritual realm. Yes, the dishes are indeed made with local seasonal ingredients and just so happen to be vegetarian. But we are not here to over-glorify anything. We're here to relish, contemplate, and remember.

DINNER TABLE



At our dinner table, we are supplied with vessels of macro and micronutrients that fuel our biomechanical functions. At our dinner table, we extract; we devour. We don't savor; we don't bridge. Nourishing with senses and intention seems surreal in this fast-moving space. Beyond the dinner table, the working hands and ecosystems subscribe to endless cycles of synthetic consumption. As they manufacture, we consume. Spaces corrupt and disintegrate. Nevertheless, we still have space for pecuniary intrusions, material hungering, and everything but the natural world.