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NY FOOD | May 2, 2013, 10:26 p.m. ET

The Original Artisanal Food

A Tasty Addition to the Frieze Art Fair

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By ANDY BATTAGLIA



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Jonathan Horowitz

Jonathan Horowitz's 2010 Installation 'Go Vegan!' The artist's work will be included in the Frieze Art Fair as part of a reconstruction of the 1970s SoHo eatery FOOD

Few restaurants make space on their menus for a dinner devoted to bones. Fewer still string those bones on rope so that patrons can wear their dinner home. But so went one of many curious occurrences at FOOD, an artist-run restaurant that was active in SoHo in the early 1970s. Beginning next week at the second annual Frieze New York art fair on Randall's Island, FOOD will be the subject of a living tribute to an original "artisanal" eatery.

Founded by Gordon Matta-Clark, Carol Goodden and other artists as a conceptual art project and a realization of collective ideals, FOOD served homey, earthy and eccentric fare to downtown pioneers who helped convert SoHo into more than a forbidding zone of industry and blight. During its heyday from 1971 to 1974, it offered sustenance spread by way of ingenuity and imagination.

"The menu was creative and crazy and sometimes not really edible, but on the other side it was very innovative," said Cecilia Alemani, the curator of the tribute, which will



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peddle provisions inspired by FOOD May 10-13 at Frieze.

With art-minded meals of yore alongside gustatory fare from other vendors at the event, "FOOD 1971/2013" will be one of many focal points at Frieze, a dynamic fair, now its second year in New York, that will present art work from more than 180 galleries, along with other conversational and performative events. Among FOOD's contributions will be a claim to the legacy of '70s New York as an art-historical epoch marked by heady reinvention and a do-it-yourself mood.



Philip Montgomery for The Wall Street Journal
Last year's Frieze fair on Randall's Island.

"We didn't know what we were doing, so we did it right the first time," said Tina Girouard, a '70s art-scene habitue and a founding member of FOOD. "SoHo was blank. Businesses and sweatshops were closing. I like to say, 'Rats desert a sinking ship; artists get on and renovate.'"

Ms. Goodden, who conceived the idea for the restaurant with Matta-Clark, envisioned FOOD as a downtown

outpost where the creative and business sides of life could commune around an open kitchen and exotic ingredients.

"It was a restaurant around the idea of an art project," she said. "I wanted a social meeting place for people to hang out and write or design their choreography or whatever they were doing. One of my primary concerns was to create a restaurant not only for the food we ate but to pay the salaries of people who worked there, so they had something to live on and could still manage their art and their shows and their performances."



Bryan Derballa for The Wall Street Journal
Cecilia Alemani, the curator of the FOOD tribute.

Artistic inclinations drifted into more workaday matters at FOOD. Occasional themed meals included an infamous "bone dinner" conceptualized by Matta-Clark, with servings of marrow, oxtail soup and aspic salad made from the gelatin in bones. An on-site jewelry-maker assembled the bones into necklaces for a ghostly memento. Other menus included a selection of "live" food, such as eggs and wriggling brine

shrimp, and an ambitious dinner, proposed by the sculptor Mark di Suvero but never realized, that would have delivered meals by way of a crane for diners to eat with chisels and screwdrivers as utensils.

Other flights of fancy placed FOOD at the forefront of much of what transpires in trendy restaurants today. It was one of the first spots in New York to serve sushi and, in a different kind of rarity for the time, the menu regularly included options for vegetarians. The design made use of natural materials and untreated wood. The open kitchen, ubiquitous now, put the acts of cooking and preparation on dramatic display, much to the FOOD crew's aesthetic liking.

"I loved the piles of everything and how they changed shapes," Ms. Goodden said.

Bonds linking the past and the present make "FOOD 1971/2013" a natural addition to Frieze, which, in a blurring of art and artisanal epicureanism, will also include provisions from progressive restaurants like Roberta's, Mission Chinese Food and the Fat Radish.

"I think it's phenomenal," said Chris Harkness, director of operations for Frankie's Spuntino and Prime Meats, homespun New York institutions that will help "FOOD

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1971/2013" behind the scenes and participate at Frieze in other pop-up forms. "Unfortunately, the ugly part of operations is not being a part of the emotional [aspect] of what a restaurant is."

The overlooked history of FOOD, which occupied a corner space at Prince and Wooster streets (now home to Lucky Brand Jeans), also recalls a time in the city when artistic intervention was more untamed. "What is an alternative art space right now, and 'alternative' to what?" asked Ms. Alemani, who commissioned the FOOD tribute as part of the Frieze Projects program. (She is also the curator and director of art on the High Line.) "What used to be alternative in the '70s has been become totally institutionalized now."

To present FOOD as more than an anachronism, the tribute will feature period-faithful fare prepared by Ms. Girouard and Ms. Goodden, as well as new meals concocted by the contemporary artists Matthew Day Jackson and Jonathan Horowitz.

"I wanted to think about material and how it's prepared, and maturity," said Mr. Jackson, whose menu will revolve around pickling, drying, stewing and salting— processes used for food preservation during dire times. "It will be a tool to meditate upon materiality, history and art."

A version of this article appeared May 3, 2013, on page A21 in the U.S. edition of The Wall Street Journal, with the headline: The Original Artisanal Food.

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