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## Feast: Smart Museum's new exhibition offers art to chew on

When Smart Museum Deputy Director and Chief Curator Stephanie Smith recruited artists for *Feast*, the museum's upcoming exhibition, she approached the guest list like any careful host.

"It was very akin to the process of putting together a dinner party," she said. "You want to make sure everyone is contributing something valuable to the whole mix; you need people with different approaches to making art in order to produce a rich experience both within and outside the gallery."

*Feast: Radical Hospitality in Contemporary Art*, opening Thursday, Feb. 16 and running through June 10, engages audiences with the integral role that meals have played in artistic expression, dialogue, and progress since the early 20th century. *Feast* will offer viewers a number of ways to experience the installation—through permanent pieces on display in the Smart Museum's gallery, and through an assortment of interactive elements and public events set in the museum and across Chicago.

One interactive feature that visitors will have access to is the artist Mella Jaarsma's piece *I Eat You Eat Me*. A pair of participants chooses food to feed one another across Jaarsma's lightweight table sculpture, which the diners mutually support on their laps. According to Smith, students who recently previewed this piece were struck by the vulnerability and intimacy the meal engendered.

Another highlight of the exhibition is Lee Mingwei's *The Dining Project*, which is making its Chicago debut. Guests, chosen by lottery, will share a one-on-one meal with Lee, who also will prepare the food. These meals aim to establish trust between strangers, and according to Lee, to make participants contemplate what art can be. Meals will take place after-hours at the museum in the midst of an elegant sculptural installation, and three of the five meals will be filmed for future manifestations of the project.

Throughout its run, *Feast* will feature lectures, workshops, cocktails, music, conversations, meals, and many other activities, all focused on different aspects and manners of sharing food and drink. The artist lineup for *Feast* includes Marina Abramović, the Italian Futurists, Laura Letinsky, professor of Cinema and Media Studies, Visual Arts and the College, Theaster Gates, director of Arts and Public Life, Rirkrit Tiravanija, and Michael Rakowitz among many others.

"Some of the artists are based here at the University of Chicago or in the city of Chicago, and all are part of an international conversation," said Smith. "*Feast* gives us the opportunity to look at something happening right now and place it in the context of art history—from the '30s to the '60s to yesterday."

*Feast's* exhibition examines this history, starting in the early 1900s, when artists in the

European avant-garde pioneered the shared meal as an artistic event and forum for dialogue about art's definition and future. From those beginnings, the shared meal developed as a medium throughout Western art. Today, this medium is globally ubiquitous, with international contemporary artists utilizing the shared meal to explore what the museum calls "radical hospitality." That hospitality is a key goal of the installation.

"We've become very attentive to thinking about what it means to make others feel welcome," Smith said, "the rigor of that and the real pleasure that comes from it."

Moreover, she continues, a major goal of *Feast* is to connect audiences with artists and to engage them with a forum—the shared meal—that is a central feature of both their lives and contemporary art.

"It's work that's vibrant and alive and speaks strongly to one of the things that makes us most human—coming together around food and drink."

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