



Justin Fitzpatrick

Alpha Salad

26 January – 8 May 2022

Justin Fitzpatrick (b.1985 Dublin, Ireland) lives in Montargis, France. His practice explores conceptual metaphors; metaphors that structure our world view and perspective. Recent works have focused on diagrammatic hydraulic imagery, anatomical drawings, sci-fi book covers and Art Nouveau illustration. Fitzpatrick's practice has steadily developed and increasingly gained critical attention and industry recognition. His work has been included in exhibitions in the UK and internationally.

Recent solo exhibitions include: *Omega Salad*, Seventeen, London (2020); *A Pulsation of the Artery*, Foxy Production, New York (2019), *URIZEN*, Sultana, Paris (2019) and *Underworld*, KevinSpace, Vienna (2018).

Justin Fitzpatrick: *Alpha Salad* is supported by the Henry Moore Foundation and Fluxus Art Projects.



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In this solo exhibition, artist **Justin Fitzpatrick** explores ideas around taste, decadence and bodily transformation.

The exhibition presents a chronological narrative from soil to table, travelling through the digestive tract of the galleries. Beginning with seed germination and photosynthesis, moving through to consider agricultural and industrial labour, food preparation and fine dining, the exhibition culminates in a reflection on taste, class, objectification and spirituality.

As well as Fitzpatrick's own painting and sculpture, *Alpha Salad* includes the artist's curated selection of works from Leeds University Library Galleries and Special Collections, including work by **Wendy Abbott**, **Duncan Grant** and **Käthe Kollwitz**, in addition to photographs from the Leeds Archive of Vernacular Culture.

Alpha Salad probes our understanding of taste as something pleasurable and sensory, as well as a type of aesthetic categorisation. Pondering the different cultural functions of tasting, enjoying and discerning, Fitzpatrick explores the tensions between the surreal theatre of food service, food production and the simple necessity to eat.

Alpha Salad serves up puppet-like plants coming of age and queer readings of hospitality workers, from existentially troubled chefs to tuxedoed flushed waiters. Against the contemporary backdrop of food poverty, the wide-reaching impacts of industrial meat farming and social media's unhealthy obsession with 'clean' eating, Fitzpatrick invites us to this neurotic feast to contemplate the grotesque nature of decadence and its underlying sensitivities.

Exhibition text continues overleaf →

Atrium

The central sculpture in the Atrium is entitled *Moteur Idéal* (Ideal Motor). A collaboration between the artist and his partner, **Nils Alix-Tabeling**, the work is an allegory of philosopher **Henri Bergson's** *Matter and Memory* (1896) in which Bergson argues the importance of both memory and physical experience acting together. Here the horses are the nervous system, reacting to external stimuli, and the cat/bat creatures represent memory. Both are brought together by a central backbone form, presenting body and mind as interdependent.

Commissioned specifically for *Alpha Salad*, the two bas-reliefs on the raised walls are an expansion of Fitzpatrick's painting practice, blending image and object making. *Horizontal Gene Transfer* depicts the movement of genetic material between two organisms, not through sexual reproduction or offspring, but through touch, and *Pollination* shows an interspecies relationship as a butterfly-like creature pollinates the heart-shaped plant-form.

Gallery 1: Seeds

We begin with a seed, cast here as an individual resistant to the forces that act upon it. *Alpha Salad* depicts the spirit of a seed dormant in the ground, reluctant to grow and take part in the world where it must change and perhaps, ultimately, be eaten. A green figure cowers from the sun's rays in *Solar Net*, the leaf burning with embarrassment under the sun's gaze as it involuntarily photosynthesises.

Photographs from the Archive of Vernacular Culture show corn dollies: charms woven from the last sheaf of corn, giving the spirit of the harvest a temporary home over winter, so it can be returned to the field and ensure a successful harvest when the dolly is burnt the following spring.

Gallery 2: Photons

Gallery 2 is dominated by a large print of the passage of the moon's shadow across England during a lunar eclipse in 1715. At this time, the Enlightenment was just beginning and science and reason were emerging as key ways of understanding the world, rather than religion and belief. In *Photon Pump* the sun hits a form that is part plant, and part erotic asphyxiation apparatus. Fitzpatrick's *Trepanning* green men, with a hole in the crown of their heads,* are suggestive of becoming literally instrumentalised, played by someone and listened to by the audience. **Trepanning' is a historical medical process involving drilling a hole into a human skull, sometimes performed for spiritual as well as medical purposes.*

Between Galleries 2 and 3

This salad leaf is a creature of the night, attempting to gain sustenance from the moon rather than the sun, eating and processing through its xylem and phloem: chains of cells that transfer water and minerals through the plant.

Gallery 3: Hormones

This gallery imagines what a plant's consciousness might be. Instead of a central nervous system like animals, plants' growth and agency are affected by hormonal changes. Hormones enable plants to grow towards sunlight, and their roots to grow downwards. *Design for Plate* imagines a plant as a kind of machine, that through flowering, works to become desirable. In *A Sap is Rising*, a human-plant hybrid is experiencing a sexual awakening, as it blossoms and bears fruit. In the vitrines, eighteenth century Yorkshire pottery is paired with Fitzpatrick's personal books about aesthetics, relationships and plant biology, woven together with red cord, knotted to resemble DNA.

Gallery 4: Muscles

In Gallery 4 we encounter the various uses of muscles: their ability to perform work, to be sculpted into subjects of aesthetic contemplation, and to be consumed. The etching by **Käthe Kollwitz** depicts a labour strike inspired by a 1941 play, and **Werner Kissling's** hay creel series shows the process of creating an elaborate structure to carry hay to livestock. A camp *Voluntary muscle with lemon* poses as if in a fashion illustration, and the central painting *Filet du Cheval au Citron* references the post-war national rebranding of horse meat to 'Cheval' to become more tasteful for British consumption.

Gallery 5: Nerves

Here we witness the transition between living and dying. Fitzpatrick presents the thin veil between life and death, sexual impulse and public life, from **Willi Baumeister's** figure undressing in a changing room to Fitzpatrick's version of **Duncan Grant's** *Bathing*, where lobsters turn red as they are boiled in a cooking pot, complete with chopped carrots. *Drawing by Sergei Eisenstein* copies and re-frames a sketch by the Soviet filmmaker. Surrounded by an intestine-like 'Bobbin' style frame, adorned with phallic worms, the drawing depicts a nervous system simultaneously leaving the body and anally penetrating its own physical form.

Gallery 6: Bodies

In Gallery 6 we enter the afterlife. Behind the scenes, as chefs prepare for service, bodies are at work and being worked upon. The drawing *Bisque* is suggestive of the sadomasochistic relationship involved in the grizzly preparation of this dish. Kollwitz's revolt has concluded in tragedy, with *Ende* depicting the motionless factory workers, and in **Arthur Machen's** *The House of Souls* we encounter a ghostly illustration by **Aubrey Beardsley**. In *Mural, Pickering Church, Descent into Hades*, modest souls are redeemed from hell by Jesus, and receive the Eucharist in an act of transubstantiation, consuming the spiritual body to nourish their own. In a dramatic end, *Phychopomp* reveals the inner turmoil that underpins a chef's gastronomic performance, as we move towards the dining table.

Gallery 7: Servers

Moving from the kitchen to front of house, we enter the libidinal world of the waiter. Both physical and emotional labour are embodied in this character, whose sense of self is divided and subdued to meet a customer's needs. Fitzpatrick considers *Omega Salad* as a self-portrait, inspired by **Kazuo Ishiguro's** novel *The Remains of the Day*. The work reflects upon the similarities that can be drawn between the performance of the server, and living in the closet, in that one is obliged to perform a specific identity in order to assimilate.

Opposite is **Wendy Abbott's** *In Heavy Air*, which visually resonates with *Omega Salad* with its rhythmic, violently sliced circles. In between the windows is **Duncan Grant's** study of *Judith and Holofernes*, a biblical story in which Judith decapitates the Assyrian general Holofernes, in order to prevent him from destroying her home city.

Gallery 8: Diners

Finally, we take a seat in the dining room. Fitzpatrick's dark and grotesque painting, *Chef's Table: France* is a homage to the Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity) movement in German art that arose during the 1920s as a reaction against expressionism. The waiter's body is the entire restaurant, with the entrance through the mouth, tables in the shoulder, and with miniature chefs either working violently on, or carving up, the waiter's penis.

In *A Conflict of Interest*, Fitzpatrick invites us to think about taste, with a cross section diagram of a personified taste bud. A Pre-Raphaelite-type figure embodies the tongue and represents taste as an aesthetic judgement, while the monk adjusting the taste buds represents a moral distinction between good or bad. The work highlights the idea that the tongue and its taste buds serve both an aesthetic purpose, being able to appreciate the harmony of different flavours, and a practical one, that informs us whether something might be harmful to eat.

The long lineage of fine dining's rigid social codes is referenced in the intricate diagrams of staged desserts illustrated in **M A Carême's** (1784-1833) chef's recipe book.

Corridor

As a digestif, this final drawing *Cuisine Roulante* is a whimsical cart of muscles propelled by lemon juice, which provides the necessary acid to cause the muscles to twitch and spasm into motion.