

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY



Georgetown Galleries' Exhibit Explores Conversations Around the Dining Table

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Georgetown Art Galleries' latest exhibit, "Around the Table," explores how food can spark conversations, shared experiences and belonging around the table.

Conceived as a series of installations, dining events and interactive art, "[Around the Table](#)" features works by contemporary national and international artists that take on the power of food, beyond the palate.

"Food is a metaphor for human experiences, shared ideas and coming around a table, especially at this divisive moment we are living," said Vesela Sretenović, who curated the exhibit. "How can we try to find what we have in common rather than what differentiates us?"

Sretenović, who previously curated contemporary art for Washington, DC's Phillips Collection, aimed to present the exhibit during the 2024 presidential election to explore how food could facilitate open dialogue and remind us of our shared humanity.



Georgetown Galleries hosted an opening reception for "Around the Table" on Sept. 27. Photos by Tony Powell.

Ultimately, Sretenović hopes that in a time of polarization, the artwork can shine a light on peaceful, open dialogue and hope.

One corner of "Around the Table" includes telegrams, archived photos and a world map from Suzanne Lacy's "[International Dinner Party](#)," a series of dinner parties hosted for women around the world that lasted 24 hours in 1979.



Suzanne Lacy's "International Dinner Party," which includes the map, telegrams and a collage of the 1979 dinner party, originally installed in the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Lacy created the series as a tribute to artist Judy Chicago. Photos by Tony Powell.

In the back of the museum, hand-blown glass pieces dangle from a clear dome that spouts audio stories when visitors stand beneath it.

The stories were collected from Georgetown and Howard University community members this summer. Each recording tells a fond memory of a time when someone made them feel like they belonged.



Jennifer Wen Ma's work, "BElonging," tells stories of belonging to patrons who stand below the center dome. Photos by Tony Powell.

Nearby, a round table is set with glass plates peppered with torn newspaper clippings of wars and crises in Gaza, Haiti, Sudan and Ukraine. One plate is empty, a cultural practice in Arab communities to welcome an unexpected guest.

"'Eat the News' juxtaposes the act of food consumption with the act of news consumption," said Art Galleries Director and Chief Curator Jaynelle Hazard. "It encourages viewers to take it in and share their own viewpoints and experiences."



Helen Zughaib, a Lebanese American artist based in DC, created the work "Eat the News," which she began in 2016. Photos by Vivian Marie Doering.

Another dinner table in the exhibit tells a different story.

A rectangular table is covered with antique glasses carrying remnants of cognac, whiskey and wine – a “nostalgic piece,” curator Sretenović says, meant to evoke the feeling of a dinner party after it’s ended, unfinished conversations, and being united and then separated.



Brazilian artist Valeska Soares' "Finale," created in 2013. Photo by Tony Powell.

“I think many of the works in this show are quite visceral and have an emotional charge behind them once you learn more and sit with it for a few moments,” said Hazard.

Since opening, the exhibit has hosted Georgetown classes, including journalism and art history classes, and members of the Racial Justice Institute. It has also hosted small dinner gatherings, in which social practice artist Philippa Pham Hughes invited diners with differing political viewpoints to discuss artwork from the exhibit.

Hazard said the galleries serve as a resource for the university and the broader community — a space for “reflection, learning, discovery, teaching and scholarship.”

“Contemporary art plays a vital role in public discourse,” Hazard said. “Our goal is to present work that engages with social and cultural conversations while aligning with the university’s values of promoting social justice, cross-cultural dialogue, and global awareness.”

“Around the Table” closes on Dec. 8.