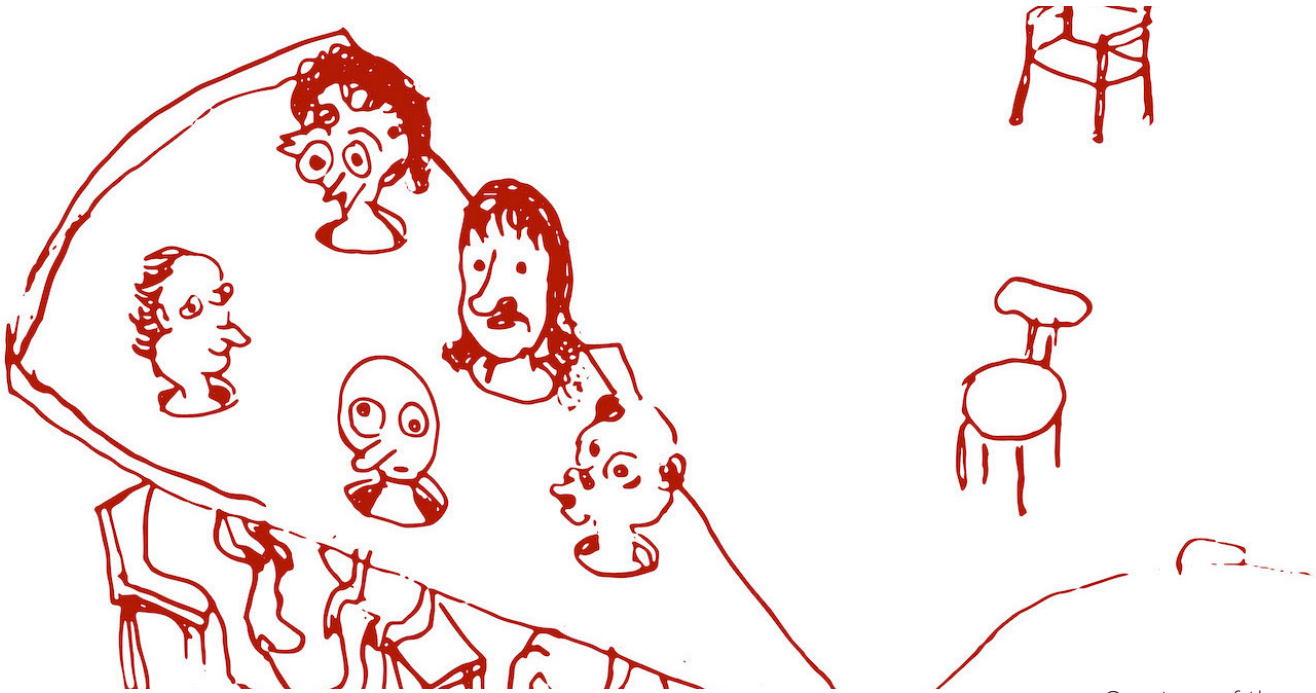




NEUBAUER
COLLEGIUM
FOR CULTURE AND SOCIETY

Gelitin: Democratic Sculpture 7

Sept. 23, 2023 – Jan. 12, 2024



Courtesy of the artists

Founded in Vienna in 1993 by Ali Janka, Florian Reither, Tobias Urban, and Wolfgang Gantner, Gelitin first met in 1978 “when they all attended a summer camp.” They have been “playing and working together” ever since, and they are now embarking on their fourth decade of collaborative artmaking with the first exhibition of their work in Chicago. Known internationally for their ambitious public art projects and transgressive performances, Gelitin are indefatigable partisans of the ludic impulse in art, forever honoring Friedrich Schiller’s claim that “man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and he is only fully a human being when he plays.” Indeed, what may appear abject, provocative, and occasionally pornographic in their art should be considered, first and foremost, from the emancipatory perspective of “homo ludens.”

Gelitin’s exhibition at the Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society, conceived in close collaboration with the fifth Chicago Architecture Biennial, consists of a major new interactive installation titled *Democratic Sculpture 7*. It is part of an ongoing series of works executed in the foursome’s signature heterodox materials: mud, sweat, urine, etc. *Democratic Sculpture 7* was developed during their exhibition at the artist-run gallery O’Flaherty’s in New York in the spring of 2023, and the

sculpture (made up primarily of colorful discarded clothing) looks an awful lot like a quintessentially New York slice of pizza. (In the broader context of Gelitin's decidedly anti-monumental, proletarian aesthetic, one could align the Arte Povera flavor of *Democratic Sculpture 7* with the no-frills, working-class roots of much Italian cuisine.) Five holes in the sculpture allow the viewer to poke their head through the pizza's toppings, thereby turning the static object into a conversation piece – proverbial food for thought, from the aesthetic of the pie chart to the politics of nutrition. The latter is a matter of real concern in some of Chicago's underserved neighborhoods (“food deserts”), which feature prominently in this edition of the Chicago Architecture Biennial, curated by local art collective Floating Museum and titled *This Is a Rehearsal*.

Much like the element of play may be dismissed as unworthy of serious intellectual consideration in the aesthetic sphere, the historical “problem” of the art world's low esteem of food, and the marginalization of gastronomic matters in western art, endure. Might one of the reasons why still-life painting has long been ranked among the lowest of all imaging genres, for instance, have something to do with its predilection for depicting foodstuffs? If that is the case, why does the world of high culture find it so difficult to take seriously what is in essence a matter of life or death? Seen from this vantage point, we may be tempted to frame Gelitin's seemingly lighthearted, jocular interest in food, and the creative powers of the digestive tract more broadly, in the larger context of a subversive “transvaluation of values” that seeks to restore to art the critical charge of what, like food and play, appears trivial but is, of course, anything but. For this is precisely why the apparently trivial is so worthy of pursuit – and why the politics of its trivialization (whether this pertains to art or food) may hold the key to a better understanding of much more than the human intestinal apparatus.

Democratic Sculpture 7 is curated by Dieter Roelstraete and presented in collaboration with the Chicago Architecture Biennial. Prior to its installation at the Neubauer Collegium, *Democratic Sculpture 7* will briefly be on view at the Chicago Cultural Center.

MEDIA INQUIRIES

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GENERAL INFORMATION

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Gallery hours: M–F, 9:00am – 4:00pm. Please visit our website for more details.