

## The taste of art and hospitality: Gupta, Continua and Belmond

"Cooking the world", Subodh Gupta's fascinating and exquisite performance made in Venice during the opening days of the Biennale is a reflection on the ritual and symbolic value of sharing food. It is the first stage of an artistic collaboration path between the Belmond Hotels and Galleria Continua, entitled MITICO.

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By Maria Teresa Capacchione

Walking into the splendid green gardens of the Hotel Cipriani, witnesses of Giacomo Casanova's amorous raids, the eye is attracted by the glitter of a building: it's a small house designed as children draw it, the archetype of the house. However, it is not made of wood or chocolate, but with four tons of very old aluminum pots and kitchen utensils from India.



*Subodh Gupta Cooking The World 2017 aluminum utensils, steel, cable, wood, kitchen appliances dimensions variable Exhibition time and place: Cipriani, A Belmond Hotel, Venice, 2022 Photo by: Agostino Osio - Alto piano Courtesy: the artist and GALLERIA CONTINUA*

On the threshold of this house, he is the one to welcome guests, a smiling, affable Subodh Gupta (1964, Khagaul, India) with a chef's apron who - together with his collaborators - invites people to sit around the table.

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Within his installation the performance begins, centered on the ritual of welcoming and sharing the food prepared by the artist to be enjoyed by the "spectator".

"The objects that surround us and today offer a comfortable shelter, a roof under which we can gather - Gupta tells the diners - have had a long life. Thousands of people ate using these utensils that were about to be scrapped and to which instead I gave a second life. Now they are the witnesses of the repetition of the ancestral rite of sharing food".

Therefore the tools as witnesses first of individual destinies, now of common cosmological destinies, create a new collective ritual space.

Gupta describes each delicious dish he offers his guests and points out that it is cooked with healthy and simple ingredients. These are typical dishes of both northern and southern Indian traditions, cooked with passion. Not special recipes, but food - such as *bhel puri* or *daal* - that the artist also prepares for himself and for friends in India, because for him cooking is a daily ritual through which to explore the socio-political aspects of eating.

Subodh Gupta's work on the rituals and symbolism of food preparation and consumption has acquired increasing significance over the years (the first performance of *Cooking the World* dates back to Art Basel 2017), even more in an era as divisive as the one we live in: in fact if for Western cultures gathering around the table indicates a sense of family bond, friendship and intimacy, in Indian communities this rite takes on even higher values because many different religious and cultural groups coexist and each one recognizes himself in one's eating habits, from what he eats (or does not eat): food in India is a very important gesture of inclusiveness and belonging.

After all the title of this performance was borrowed from the essay by the French historian of religions, orientalist and indologist Charles Malamoud ("*Cooking the World: Ritual and Thought in Ancient India*", 1987) a reference for the Indian artist, who recognizes the great ability to "think through the ritual" in the culture and philosophy of the Subcontinent.

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Subodh Gupta's performance is among the events that inaugurated this 59th Venice Biennale and the choice of the Hotel Cipriani is not accidental: as announced by Lorenzo Fiaschi - one of the three founders of the Galleria Continua with whom for more than twenty years Gupta collaborates - this performance inaugurates a project between the prestigious and unstoppable contemporary art gallery Continua and the Belmond hotel chain: four of the most fascinating hotels in Italy will become an exhibition space for installations and performances by the same number of artists. A project that takes the name of MITICO and which will involve - as well as Gupta in Venice -, Leandro Erlich at Villa San Michele in Florence, Michelangelo Pistoletto at Castello di Casole in Tuscany and Pascale Marthine Tayou at the Grand Hotel Timeo in Taormina .



*Subodh Gupta Cooking The World 2017 Exhibition time and place: Cipriani, A Belmond Hotel, Venice, 2022 Photo by: Marco Valmarana Courtesy: the artist and GALLERIA CONTINUA*