

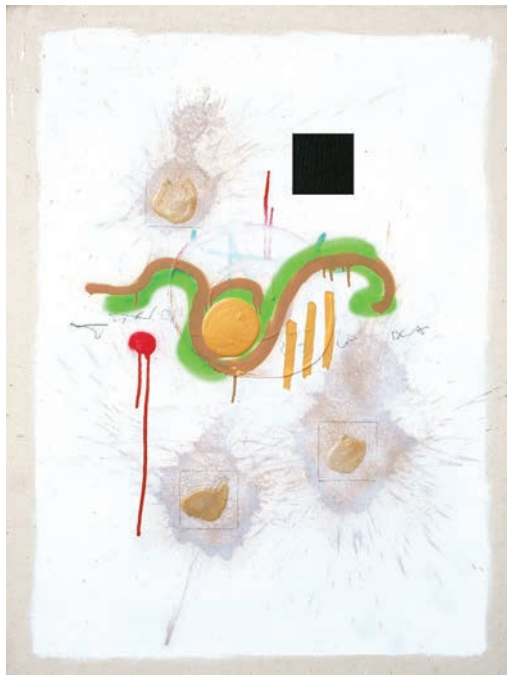


DISHES, DECONSTRUCTED

A SQUIGGLY LINE of green acrylic paint is a chili pepper in “Chiles en Nogada.” Sand is a hamburger bun in “Royale Burger au Poivre Ailoi et Gruyere.” Blue and white seashells rise up from a canvas soup in “Zuppa Di Pesce,” nestled among more sand and paint, graphite and coffee beans.

In a series of paintings currently on display at The Block Gallery, Raleigh-based artist **Georges Le Chevallier** takes inspiration—and materials—from the culinary world to deconstruct and reimagine some well-loved dishes from nine of Raleigh’s top chefs. It’s an exhibit born of an existential dilemma Le Chevallier experienced around five years ago, as well as a tribute to the deep and diverse talents comprising Raleigh’s food scene.

Burnt out by the frenetic pace of life in an overly connected world, and the pressure to be in constant communication with others via technology, Le Chevallier stopped looking at



Dahi Puri (after Chef Cheetie Kumar)



Georges Le Chevallier

art and, for a spell, even stopped painting. Instead, he contemplated shibui, a Japanese term that refers to a simple, understated sense of aesthetic beauty. At the same time, Le Chevallier, a former employee of the fine dining industry, rediscovered a love for food.

“I started reading about food, watching documentaries about food, and I’d see a lot of similarities in painting and food,” Le Chevallier says. “Shibui is a way of deconstructing, taking out what’s not essential. This led to me painting these minimalist, more simple paintings.”

With this new series, Le Chevallier explains, he wanted to capture chefs’ personal connections to the food they make for others to enjoy.

For “Jamaican Curry Goat,” for instance, Le Chevallier approached Oro’s executive chef Chris Hylton, who told a story of making the dish in his home country of Jamaica for the first time, hoping to impress his grandmother. Hylton recalled his grandmother tasting the curry and telling him how much she enjoyed it. And, for “Dahi Puri,” Garland Chef Cheetie Kumar talked about eating the chaat snack with her family growing up in India, but only on special occasions—they bought the dish from street vendors, and her parents worried about whether the food had been safely prepared.

“These chefs are human beings and

they are inspired by food and, yet, we don’t usually talk about what inspires them,” Le Chevallier observes. “We always talk about their backgrounds, restaurants, work, but we don’t go into the essential. I wanted to touch something more personal.”

The nine paintings are unique in that, in an artistic turn on the tradition of molecular gastronomy, they incorporate ingredients from the individual dishes that inspired them. “Rice Congee” uses rice and green tea; “Salade Fraise aux Lardon avec un Oeuf Dur” uses olive oil and grapefruit juice and “Chilled Espresso with Ginger Beer and Rosemary-Grapefruit Bitters” uses coffee beans and raspberries.

“Olive oil was not too great as a stain,” Le Chevallier says. “But the green tea was amazing, I loved the green tea. It made this beautiful green.”

Le Chevallier, who spent his youth between France and Puerto Rico, and has lived in Los Angeles and New York City, moved to Raleigh with his wife, Carrie, 18 years ago. He marvels at how much the city has grown, and at how diverse and vibrant its food scene has become.

“We have chefs from Colombia, Laos, India, Jamaica, France, Italy, it’s amazing,” Le Chevallier says. “When I started this project, I didn’t realize how many quality chefs we have from different parts of the world. We are really lucky for that.”

The Block Gallery is located on the first and second floors of the Raleigh Municipal Building. The exhibit is on display through August 24.



Royale Burger au Poivre Ailoi et Gruyere (after Chef Jeff Seizer)