Food, in aesthetic discourse, has its own apex in the culinary arts. The culinary arts are defined by the processing of raw food stuffs into consumable portions, which are in some way better, according to specific cultural and aesthetic norms. Processing can involve adding heat (cooking), removing heat (cooling), adding time (marinating, fermenting) and adding other materials (other foods). On a chemical level, a lot goes on within each of these processes, usually simultaneously, that we cannot really get into here. However, next time you cook, think of your meal as a scientific experiment. Change things a bit and take note: add or subtract other ingredients or spices, slow down your cooking time or speed it up and then slow it down. On a material level, humans are most familiar with food stuffs precisely because over generations, many sat there at the hearth, experimenting and observing. Cooks to alchemists, scientists to artists, food has tracked with revolutions in human thinking. Its abundance has sustained humanity’s ascendance.

—JOEL KUENNEN

Americans consume enough calories, but not the number of vitamins and minerals recommended by the US Food and Drug Administration. Up until the 1970s, calamitous famines would claim ten million lives every decade. Over the last twenty-five years, the number of deaths has decreased to about 500,000 per decade. You may have heard of the Malthusian Trap, a popular theory established by Robert Malthus, which posited that population growth inevitably ends in famine as a control to stabilize the relationship between resource and consumer. Throughout history, this idea of nature being the moral arbiter of who lives and dies has been used to justify mass starvation, mostly within a colonial framework. Today, one could argue, it is being used to keep poor Americans malnourished without so much as a humanitarian sigh.

For a sign of how far removed food has come from the known material people have cooked with for millennia, gander at the people convinced to eat detergent pods just because they looked like “food.”

“A sign of how far removed food has come from the known material people have cooked with for millennia, gander at the people convinced to eat detergent pods just because they looked like “food.” It is not difficult to imagine a 3-D printer, but for food. This may not mean a return to the hearth and home garden, but at least it re-centers what we eat, and how we cut, around our homes in the most efficient way possible. The hearth may be a refillable flavor-molecule printer and the garden a glowing vat of algae, but with the control of our food systems close at hand, feast will be more likely than famine.”

“Nonfood is a stranger to the food sciences. His artwork, and indeed his recent exhibition, Receptor-Binding Variations presents a simple series of pressure-based diffusers that release a mix of 2–7 scent molecules. Sniffing a diffuser leaves one with a partial trace of something, though the scents themselves are incomplete as far as our familiar register can tell. Some have traces of cherry and pineapple—Raspet let on that this particular molecule combination shared the organizational structure of a molecule found in both fruits—but claim neither. Others, a component of molding fettuccine, a waft of pine, or maybe lemon? It is amazing how quickly the mind places these partial scents, finding some sort of categorization, even if they tick multiple and contradictory boxes. Raspet’s larger practice speaks to an interest in food science literature. As our sensibilities with regard to the aesthetics of food continue to be abstracted beyond the raw material, it is not difficult to imagine a 1-D printer, but for food. This may not...