

CRISTIN TIERNEY



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MK Guth: Menu | Cristin Tierney Gallery (NYC)

JOSEPHINE ZARKOVICH



MK Guth, *Dinner to Tell a Joke*, 2019. perfect bound book, 6 silver fall zero absorption porcelain cups with holding chips. book: 13 1/4 x 9 1/4 inches.

Language is often described in terms of consumption: to eat one's words, to digest a passage of text, to devour a novel. In these turns of phrase the body is always present, ready to absorb meaning through the stomach. MK Guth's exhibition *Menu* at Cristin Tierney Gallery takes up these themes through a series of handmade instructional books, meticulously crafted objects, and small, illustrative ink drawings. With titles such as *Dinner to Tell a Joke*, *Menu for Getting There*, *Menu for Getting What You Want*, and *Dinner for Getting Over It Or At Least Getting Through It*, the works run from how-to guides to metaphoric ponderings. One text offers practical advice on what to serve houseguests upon their arrival, another consists of a nonsensical series of knock-knock jokes arranged and bound to look like a tall restaurant menu. One passage from *Instructions for Engaging with Clouds* offers: "Add some cream to a cup of tea. Study the cloud formation."

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Installation view of *MK Guth: Menu*. Cristin Tierney Gallery, New York. September 13 - October 26, 2019. Photo by John Muggenborg.

Despite the centrality of written text in the exhibition, Guth's work is explicitly physical and produced with a high level of craft. Set on unvarnished wooden plinths mounted around the room, the sculptural objects are arranged small groupings, with the books placed in conversation with paintings and everyday-use objects. These juxtapositions also drive much of the humor that permeates the exhibition. *Dinner for Getting Over It Or At Least Getting Through It* is a bound black book accompanied by a bowl of matches and a small booklet with gold cover text reading "burn me, let go." *Dinner to Tell a Joke* offers six shiny red clown-like noses that double as drinking glasses. To access the text within the books viewers must wear bright blue rubber gloves, a precaution that protects the paper but also ensures that the conceptual nature of the pieces remain firmly rooted in the bodily experience.



MK Guth, *Dinner for Getting Over It Or At Least Through It*, 2019. perfect bound book, ceramic bowl, bound burn pages, matches. book: 14 1/2 x 9 1/4 inches.

Menu is not Guth's first exploration of communal consumption and social interaction. The artist's 2012 exhibition, *When Nothing Else Subsists Smell and Taste Remain*, was built around a series of hosted dinner conversations inside the Art Gym at Marylhurst University. More

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recently, 2016's *Instructions for Drinking with a Friend* invited audience members to spend an hour inside Cristin Tierney Gallery drinking whiskey with a friend while discussing a topic they usually did not talk about. Compared to those two projects, *Menu* is a much more meditative series. The menus, in particular, are broken up into collections of passages containing a beginning, middle and end—starter, 2nd course, main course, dessert—suggesting a duration of time, though how that time should be spent is ambiguous. In *Menu for Getting There*, the starter consists of a quote from Mary Oliver, Pablo Picasso, and Marcel Proust. Perhaps Guth has moved on from orchestrating experiences that explore relationships between people to a more intimate conversation between the artist and the viewer. While objects have been the core of Guth's practice, this exhibition still retains a sense of invitation and performance. The works are not simply instructions or commands: they are offerings, allowing space for viewers to set their own table.



Installation view of *MK Guth: Menu*, 2019. Cristin Tierney Gallery, New York. Photo by John Muggenborg.

MK Guth's *Menu* at Cristin Tierney Gallery ran from September 13 - October 26, 2019.

**Images courtesy of Cristin Tierney Gallery*