

Table Manners

A group exhibition celebrating
five years of **The Artist Roundtable**,
an initiative created by Pia Sophie Ottes



10 January – 14 February 2026

Barbati Gallery
Palazzo Lezze
Campo Santo Stefano
San Marco 2949
30124 Venice, Italy



Drawing for Table Manners, 2025
Noemi Durighello



Drawing for Table Manners, 2025
Kate Dunn

Commensality & Dissensus

The art of eating while almost agreeing

ESSAY BY JULIA MARCHAND

The exhibition **Table Manners** is a moment to sustain, bear, prop, and hold up¹. It holds a community while suggesting commensality: an act of sitting together, of sharing, of debating, of being, of holding. Perhaps of eating. Commensality doesn't rhyme with mastication, but with rituals. A ritual that transforms oneself, from being a bounded individual to an open plane, welcoming others. Commensality is also on the menu in the art world. Perhaps for a desire to renew its social model and common spaces. Who didn't want to change things?

In recent years, exhibition curators have become gardeners, artists have shaped the earth, moved closer to the "peripheries", embraced the countryside. Many have favoured the kitchen as an expansion of their curatorial and artistic practices. The restaurant world is no exception. Having also undergone its crisis, it has experimented with more evolving, more collegial, and also more situated forms. These two worlds participate in the same overhaul of sensibility, engaged for some time already. It's impossible, however, to place the entire cause on the Covid years: they were merely the accelerator, sometimes the exhaustion. The mutation at work has its roots in the experiments of the 1970s, then in the aftershocks of the 2008 crisis.



Drawing for Table Manners, 2025
Eleanor May Watson

It brings to mind the **FOOD initiative** by Carol Goodden, Tina Girouard, and Gordon Matta-Clark in New York, as well as the pedagogical experiments of Emanuel Almborg, or the irresistible transversal approach of Céline Condorelli with *Support Structure* and *Notes on Friendship* or *Art and Agriculture* by artists Natsuko Uchino and Peter Nadin in upstate New York, but also **TOCIA!** or the very recent **Revenge Food Library** by Sylvia Segura². In sum, community spaces and research sites where issues of production and ethics intersect with problems specific to the art world and those of the restauration field.

Something remains central to these initiatives: the communal fact, or even the idea of friendship as a working condition, as a "company that one chooses to keep" or even friendship as a production of a culture³. It should not be understood as an exclusive group of friends, but rather as a "cultura animi", a kind of humanism. In this way, the choices and alliances that we make all the time, even the books we read, the food we decide to cook, to share and to eat.

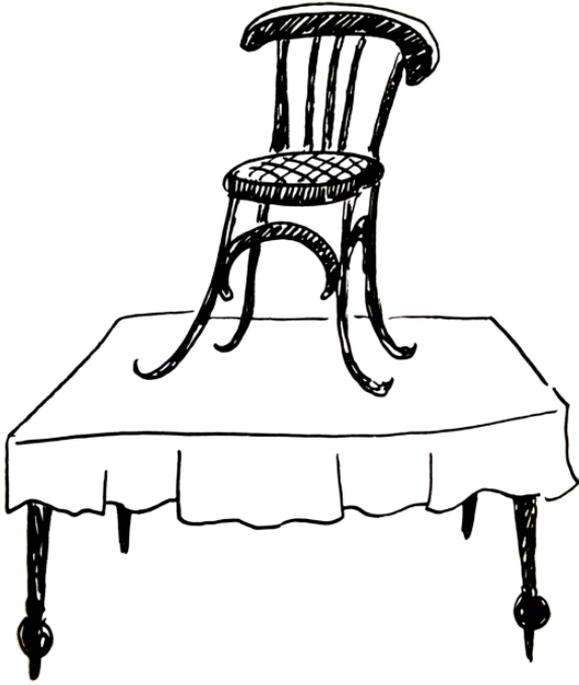
Let's consider a few books to see if such reading might embody the shared sensibility this exhibition seeks: a moment of convergences, of communality, and a restitution of the "cultura animi" at work behind **The Artist Roundtable**.

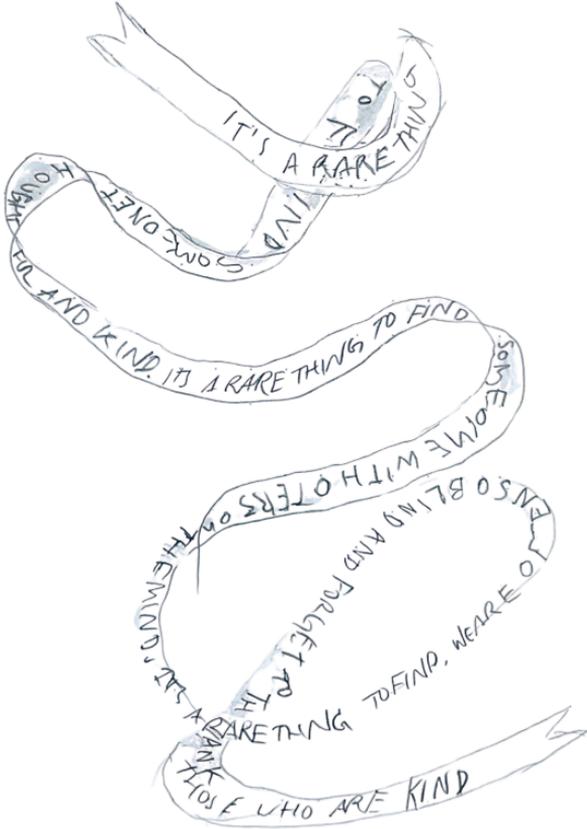
In one of the books collected in the **Revenge Food Library**, we find the Cookbook by artist Dorothy Iannone, an almost-comic-book masterpiece, where we let ourselves be engulfed by recipes, drawings, notes, stains, crossed-out words, signs of an intense love life. In the middle of the gazpacho recipe, we can read:

"I don't like to be sad. Half the time I am. At least I can transform pain into color. That's already something. PAIN IS LIKE PAINTING." In the middle of recipes, then, Dorothy Lannone's life as a woman shines through, dispelling the domestic alienation usually associated with the cookbook or its discipline. The contagion shines through in the restitution of vulnerability.

Babette's Feast, the 1987 film adapted from Karen Blixen's story, offers another mediation on commensality as transformation. *Babette*, a French chef in exile and activist, spends her entire lottery winnings on a single extravagant meal for the austere Protestant community that sheltered her. The feast becomes an act of radical generosity, dissolving years of resentment due to her political commitment around a table. What is striking is not just the culinary prowess, but the way the meal operates as a form of care that doesn't announce itself, a gift that transforms without demanding recognition. The guests, initially resistant, find themselves softened, reconciled, opened: a commensality in process.

But the table also has the capacity to hold disagreement. For an exhibition like this, bringing together fifty artists from different horizons, this dimension may be considerable. Disagreement is one of the ingredients of friendship as culture, and in the political sphere it recalls dissensus: the transformation of "communal crisis" and the basis of «Democratic Agonism». Chantal Mouffe is the ambassador of this subject, inviting us to accept the idea that democracy isn't about eliminating conflict but about transforming antagonism (where the other is an enemy to be channelled) into agonism (where the other is an adversary to be respected).





Drawing for Table Manners, 2025
Amelia Bowles

It is about providing a structure that can hold friction without fracture. In light of this, the table is a space where we practice being in disagreement without being muted towards each other, where we learn that coexistence doesn't require strict ideological alignment. Take, for instance, artist Anne Neukamp's contribution to this project as a guest speaker. She advocates for an ethics of refusal in favour of quiet time in the studio. This perspective on production and visibility might not resonate with every artist involved in **Table Manners**, and that's precisely the point. The table can hold this disagreement too, this friction between the impulse to gather and the need to retreat, between visibility and productive withdrawal.

This brings me to these questions: with the naturalisation of antagonistic lifestyles as a contemporary condition (morning this, afternoon that), with the shrinking of our virtual bubbles that always privilege like-minded people, with the fear, deep down, of speaking, and of agonism, I wonder how the communal can still carve out a path. Perhaps not in grand gestures, not in manifestos, but through these repeated acts: sitting down, waiting, listening, witnessing, letting someone finish their sentence even when it prickles us. **Table Manners** doesn't propose to resolve the art world's desertion mentioned above, or the various crises, but strikes a proposal to inhabit them differently, to make friction into material rather than deadened. Fifty artists around a single proposition – this isn't harmony, it's the wager that dissonance can be productive if we consent to stay on a virtual or real table.

¹ Céline Condorelli, *Support Structure*, Steinberg Press, 2009-2014

² Sylvia Segura & Julia Marchand podcast *Everythingism*, Projets Média, December 2025

³ Céline Condorelli speaking about Hannah Arendt's idea of culture in *Notes on Friendship*, Mousse, 2012-2021



Drawing for Table Manners, 2025
Joana Galego