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Spicing Up Downtown

What do songs, food, and David Byrne have to do with lower Manhattan? Together they inspired a recipe book full of ideas for reimagining the area below 14th Street.

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In an inventive new project that throws orthodox planning out the window, the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council serves up a “recipe” book of sorts to inspire new thinking about downtown. Titled *More Songs About Buildings and Food: Recipes for Downtown*, the book is the brainchild of LMCC Associate Curator Adam Kleinman. Building upon precedents of other recipe books from Buckminster Fuller (*Synergetic Stew: Explorations in Dymaxion Dining*) and Cedric Price (*Re: CP*) that introduce cooking as a metaphor for architecture, Kleinman sought to generate ideas from the public about downtown. He called on artists, architects, musicians, writers, and the general public to suggest recipes for how they would spice up the area below 14th Street.

What resulted is a compilation of recipes from creative thinkers as wide-ranging as Talking Head ex-front man David Byrne, Vito Acconci, Christo + Jeanne-Claude, Marina Abramovic, Greg Sholette, and Meredith Monk, as well as construction workers, street vendors, and even a tourist or two. Close to 150 submissions were received and approximately 60 will appear in the book.

“The recipes map desires and expectations as much as pragmatic issues about life downtown,” Kleinman observes. Spanning political satires and critiques to real architectural plans, the recipes showcase as diverse an array of ideas as those who conceived of them. Byrne, whose second album was titled *More Songs About Buildings and Food*, envisioned a multi-faceted bike project to take shape over the next year. “I ride a bike around New York for transportation and still find a lot of tension between bikers and the city. I think there’s a creative way to fashion more livable spaces that accommodate a range of transportation cultures,” Byrne says.

Lyn Rice, principal of Lyn Rice Architects who has lived and worked in downtown for 12 years, proposed “De-Central Park”, similar in scale to Central Park but laid out over rooftops throughout downtown. “There’s a real need for more open space downtown. The proposal was to de-privatize the roofscape of lower Manhattan. It’s an opportunity not to take over real estate or streetscape, but to make public this kind of existing landscape of roofs that already exist.”

Other recipes are literal, such as Christo + Jeanne-Claude’s recipe for tartor, a Bulgarian yogurt dish, while others entries are poetic. The ideas are thoughtful and zany, sharp and flavorful, promoting mixed use and greater vitality in the area. What’s more, the recipes for the area are generated by the users of that area. “These are people who use the city, and while perhaps not all are planning professionals, their thoughts are just as valid as users of that shared space,” Kleinman notes.

Without tying ideas down by financial or other constraints, the recipe book ultimately invites a utopian vision for the area. “The book’s premise offers an opportunity to speculate on what the possibilities for

downtown could be. Projects are allowed to be visionary,” Rice comments. Or dystopian, as the case may be. Kleinman notes that “sometimes a critique is just as valid as a suggestion.” Either way, *More Songs About Buildings and Food: Recipes for Downtown* offers some fresh perspectives for downtown.

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LMCC is making the book available for free to the general public, and will be gifting it to downtown decision-makers, planners, and officials. Using the services of Lower East Side’s printing and design studio Dexter Sinister, a limited first-edition run will be distributed at the book’s launch on Friday, September 15th, until copies run out. The recipe book’s launch is part of the second annual summit, *What Comes After: Cities, Art and Recovery* hosted by LMCC to bring the global, historic conversation of recovery to downtown New York. Events are scheduled from September 14-17, 2006 and include exhibitions, panel discussions, performances, and film screenings. A second run of the recipe book is slated and Kleinman will be presenting the recipes at the kick-off of Architecture Week in October.