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■ features and interviews

welcome and timeline

directory database

news

features and interviews

- » Samantha Ellis
- » Amazônia
- » Theatres go green
- » Puppet Wranglers
- » Vandana Shiva
- » Richard Mabey
- » Jonathon Porritt
- » Climate debate
- » John Fox
- » Siân Ede
- » Feast
- » David Rothenberg
- » Konflux Theatre

useful links

contact us

Eat London, was a London International Festival of Theatre (LIFT) event in Trafalgar Square. Sue Palmer joins in:

Liquorice gates and Battenburg blocks, gingerbread roads with bright red urban clearway icing lines, a red and white grape Gherkin, the Thames full of sparkling Perrier and the London Eye a pizza wheel with red pepper capsules, **LIFT's 'ceremony of urbanphagy (eating the city)'** took place in London's Trafalgar Square on the hot and sunny last Saturday in April.



Eat London: the West End

Waffle brickwork and icing cement, towers of cucumber sandwiches (triangular), finely chopped green spring onion lawns, a rich Tate Britain fruit cake covered in white marzipan with blue iced features, an also chop Nelson's Column - all this and so much more laid out on a day that began with a 3-dimensional food map of central London assembled together, followed by a musical parade where the 14 individual stalls were wheeled apart and the food served up free to the visitors - we ate London.



Eat London: the Gherkin and Tower 42

Community groups such as Nu-Life, Project Phakama, Roj Women's Association had each made a section of central London, and as the architected food was consumed, a large scale black and white map of their chosen area gradually appeared through the crumbs.

There is something fantastic about suddenly recognising an iconic London landmark made out of sponge cake and crafted icing features - you see the artistry and the playfulness of the maker, and architectural grandeur rendered domestic. And then there's the fun of not recognising a place and asking one of the cooks, and the quick working out that indeed a whole field of rice balls and peas is the shape and structure of Hyde Park.

I arrived just as the stalls were serving up, seeing the first knives unceremoniously slice up the ginger bread roads. It was passed out to the crowds in light wooden trays - the food appeared strangely resonant and exotic, as if imbued with a sense of democracy; we were finally consuming the city rather than the city consuming us.



Eat London: food artist Alicia Rios

Both traditional and contemporary foods were cooked and placed together to reflect the diversity and coherence of London. Colourful, radiant, handmade, generous - every stall

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was good to look at. There were queues circulating all around the Square as people aimed for a slice of the Houses of Parliament, or Selfridges. And the atmosphere was joyous, social and available - participatory in the best sense of the word in relation to theatre.

Originally initiated in Melbourne as part of its community cultural development programme, Ali&Cia's Eating The City had a strong sense of social building and democratic activity about it - it's good to eat City Hall. I began imagining the places I know well made out of food, and eating them - we are surrounded by what we eat, animals continually graze on their food maps; Eat London had this blatant reality and honesty to it - 'we are what we eat' took on multiple dimensions.



eating London

After the event I wandered down Whitehall, coinciding with the mysterious Changing of the Guards, on to **Brian Haw** standing in his 3 square metres on Parliament Square, and then to Tate Britain and **Mark Wallinger's** reconstruction of Haw's original protest against the Iraq war. The new protest exclusion line (1km around the Houses of Parliament) runs straight through Tate Britain and hence through the middle of the reconstructed line of placards and teddy bears.

I was consumed with thoughts of democracy and political protest, citizenship and social engagement. Eat London (in a Trafalgar Square also now in the exclusion zone) was an excellent demonstration of art inviting people to connect - a feast for the eyes, mouth and heart.



Sue Palmer makes contemporary performance working both individually and collaboratively as a performer and director, and is an Associate Lecturer in Theatre at Dartington College of Arts in Devon. Recent work includes **It Is For The Tiger** listed here on the Directory.

Photo credit:

All photographs are by Tim Mitchell and are from the **LIFT Eat London** webpages

For **Eat London**, 200 cooks from **community groups** across London worked with Spanish food artist Alicia Rios and architect Barbara Ortiz.

Some of their **recipes for London landmarks** are on the LIFT website.

www.liffest.org.uk



Eat London - complete map

[page top](#) 📄

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[home](#) | [welcome and timeline](#) | [directory database](#) | [news](#) | [features and interviews](#) | [useful links](#) | [contact us](#)

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