

FOOD AND ART IN SOCIAL MEDIA TIMES,

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Curator

Images/ Courtesy of
RAFRAM CHADDAD

Some



"burrata with sweet olive oil and zaatar" December 31, 2020

INGREDIENTS

and an attempt to make a recipe of

A myriad of daily images about food, from cooking, fresh markets, whisking ingredients, baking or steaming, alternated with views of the Mediterranean, seen, smelled and tasted from the south, the coastline of Tunis: if you want to know more, follow @rafram_x on Instagram.



"_ 1. the orange peel series that was the inspiration for a whole exhibition dealing with coffee, ink production, oranges, stages of drying..." November 21, 2021

Monday, September 20, 2021, Rafram Chaddad just posted an image: "It's sukkot tonight and one of the symbolic elements of it is the citrus (etrog, cedrat), this photo is from last winter when we went with M'barek Bouhchichi to his hometown Akka in the Anti-Atlas." I ask M'barek in a WhatsApp message what 'cedrat' is in Tachelhit or in Akka: 'kronj,' he answers in an audio message.

Rafram Chaddad (Djerba, 1976) is an artist "who thinks on the margins of imagination," as he describes himself in a recently updated version of his biography: "In my photographs, films and installations, I rethink the possibilities of return, displacement, and communal ritual." His family has lived on the island of Djerba for 2700 years. For many years now, Rafram has been interested in the place of food in our culture, "when you learn about food, you also understand how to cook it." He's currently working on *Leftovers* (working title), a book project on the way in which food practices interact between different cities within the post-Ottoman area. Food as a shared experience, collecting histories of food making beyond the confines of states and borders.

"Storytelling has been an important part of my work as a way to re-direct discourse to the everyday rather than the canonical. This is something we can do as artists, and it is part of our role." I'm quoting Rafram here from a recent published interview. Storytelling is also remembering a moment in time, he states, a time that is still being written in the present, with language and its manifestations, the spoken and the unspoken. In other words, untangling colonial histories of the region and those that have been excluded is an important part of his collaborative food book project with Judeo-Tunisians communities.

Saturday, January 23, 2021. It's near midnight in Sidi Moussa, Marrakech. I just arrived with some Belgian chocolate and plastic dinosaurs in my suitcase. Rafram Chaddad lands an hour later. It's our first encounter, thanks to the hospitality of Samya Abid and Eric Van Hove. When Rafram opens his suitcase fresh 'clementines' pop out (a spontaneous citrus hybrid that arose in the late 19th century in Algeria), fresh dates still hanging on branches and a few bottles of *Boukha*, a fig brandy. Its name means 'alcohol vapor' in Judeo-Tunisian or Judeo-Amazigh dialect. The story goes that it was distilled for the first time industrially at the end of the 19th century by a Tunisian Jew, Abraham Bokobsa, in his factory in La Soukra. It is obtained by natural distillation of figs. The *Boukha* bottles would travel with us during our research trip to the region of Tata, part of the province of Sus-Massa.

Rafram Chaddad's ways of seeing

Thursday, February 3, 2022, a new Insta post: Rafram holds a multi-colored orange slice in his hands, the sea is in the background beyond in between adjacent houses. There is no sound but I can hear different waves of eclectic sounds from the Arab World, DJ habibi funk - حبيبي فنك - is Rafram's neighbor in La Goulette (Halq al-Wādi). "first days of orange sekasli," he writes without capital letters, "or as it [is] also called the Jewish orange. beginning of the 19th century, bokobza from the distillery went to aleppo and brought sweet oranges later, in soukra, behind the distillery, he mixed the sweet orange with local bitter red. the result, until today, is a mix orange with great taste."

«It's not only a question of cooking but also of everything around it, the social structures, the relationships of transmission of knowledge... It can't just be folklore. When we talk about chakchouka, bkaïla, brick, we think about their origin," he says in *La Press.m*. The secret of the stoves, of spices and flavors, is shared in kitchens and in marketplaces, with words in different languages and hands, but always with the same social sense of care. It's about the flows, the influences and concordances beyond national borders.

The Fish Smuggler (Rafram Chaddad, 2018), are prints realized in 2018 of x-ray images of a suitcase containing five neatly lined fish next to each other. Rafram produced the print in an edition of five. "This is called *The Fish Smuggler* because I always take fish to my mother [in Jerusalem]. I freeze them and put them in my suitcase," he reveals in *Al-Monitor* and he compares the fish to his family story. "Fish have neither nationality nor a country," he says, "Israel appropriates Arab Jewish food. It is occupied food, strange and weird as it sounds."

Saturday, June 19, 2021, storytelling as a way to redirect discourse to the everyday, Rafram's words touch a chord. He sends me a message and reacts to one of my latest Insta stories, an aerial photo of Robert Smithson's Broken Circle/ Spiral Hill from 1971. Broken Circle might actually be a fish, I commented on the photo. "looks like the punic port here," accompanied by a satellite view of the port of Carthage, "made by hannibal, for protection." Baal-hanan, ba'-al-ha'-nan (Hebrew) – Baal is gracious. We start sending each other short text messages about Fish In Fish Out, an ongoing project of a blue painted mural consisting of a hand holding a zigzagging line with five fish. The first one dates from 2006 in Djerba: "It started not as an 'artwork' but as a painting on Jewish houses, as part of tradition. They asked me to paint it since they heard I am an 'artist.' It's a painting done on new houses after a newly married couple goes in. It's 2 'five', hamsa. Five fingers, hand, Five fish." Arabic: خمسة أصابع, romanized: khamsah, Hebrew: חמשה, romanized: hamsā. "The first time the painting was done out of its original context was in 2013. In Leipzig." When did you make one in La Goulette? "Djerba is where those fish are done. And my birthplace. Two summers ago I made one in the fish market there. Also as part of 'art' and not ritual. For the ritual, I get paid. It's like a service. In the ritual the painting fight[s an] evil eye, that [is] projected on the new[ly] married couple. It is very weird to me. Until today. The different context of the same work." Would you compare it with an animistic way of looking at the past to look at the future? "I think these paintings have different power in Djerba than in public spaces. Where people believe in it, it has power." It's like an amulet, a way to distract the evil powers? "Yes. Fish always with open eyes. Like mezuzah in the house. That's why I am thinking of making a few tiny objects for old walls with [a] mezuzah holes I found in old Jewish houses."

History put into practise, the suggestion of new recipes made of old ingredients, spices and collective contemporary cooking stories. The politics of tomatoes too. Knowing and 'not-knowing', as mentioned by Renée Green: "The space of not-knowing means being open to what other possibilities might arise, it means that you're discovering in the process of engaging, interacting, and enacting. Importantly, 'not-knowing' opens up to imagining, as well." Rafram Chaddad wrote about edible books for @foodlemology: "Stanislaw Lem [remember the science fiction novel *Solaris*] was dreaming of edible books. Seems like eating something might help you to acquire knowledge. But for me, it's usually the opposite. Food takes you back, your brain stops working and you are full of joy. It is a bit like an orgasm. Papers and food have been in my mind for a long time. I have decided to work on the Turkish thin dough, called Yufka, or a Greek one called – Filo, or

"russian light. in a talk about different light and why all my photos from tunis looking good and other photos are just different. i took this photo in my apartment's balcony in moscow, few years ago. dried fruits and pistachio from former soviet union." October 24, 2021



the one we have in Tunis, Malsuka. They are all similar kinds of dough papers, almost like textiles, waiting for someone to write on them."

Tuesday, January 26, 2021, we're walking through Akka, in the kasbat Sidi Abdellah Ben M'barek. A purple piece of textile masks an opening between the sand-colored mud bricks. It's almost lunch time when we enter the oasis, a date palm grove with different agricultural fields and on one side the wadi Oued Akka. Close to the waterside another piece of textile, pink on the side with green, blue and yellow patterns and with small black dots, is drying between tall reeds.

On Thursday, February 11, 2021 Rafram sends me an e-mail and writes about how, during our journey, he kept watching clothes getting dry on trees, "like installations." It reminds him of an ongoing project about the 'shefshari' of Jewish women from Djerba: "It's a cloth that was brought from India in 6-7th century by Jewish merchants. very similar to 'sari'. and i was thinking after i saw the trees with the clothes, to hang them on a few olive trees and take a few shots. Or on argan trees, like goats." In a following message a reproduction of a black and white photograph of his grandmother, her mother and his mother is included. They are wearing the traditional shefshari and standing in Hara Sghira. He adjoins another historical document, another photoshoot, from Liliias Hamilton in 1894, depicting Koochi women in Afghanistan. "just imagine wearing a shefshari for her entire life," he posted about his grandma Khamsana on Instagram, "eating and mostly cooking the same food. couscous fish for tuesday, beef couscous for friday. fried fish every monday, harrisa every saturday. baking bread, making wine, rituals on rituals, fragments from a new work [...]."

A post from 75 weeks ago, "before summer tomatoes will end, here's a quick recipe of marmuma aka nakbuba aka marduma aka confit tomates

cut around 3kg of tomatoes to big or small cubes, put in a good iron pot on medium fire and wait until most of the liquid disappear, add spoon of paprika, sugar and salt. mix well and add few heads of garlic, some of the cloves minced and some full, add around 1 kg of spicy green peppers, roughly chopped, 2 spoons of good harrisa and around 200-300 ml of olive oil. bring to boil and then reduce fire to the minimum possible.

mix from time to time for around 6-8 hours until starting to turn black. remove from fire and add generous amount of grounded caraway.

marmuma is great on bread, with fried aubergine or mixed with eggs and fried. some cook it more light and mix it with cooked potatoes or turnips.

marmuma is an important part of 'kemia', around 20 kind of small salads that tunisian jews like to eat Friday night, before the couscous arrives.

last footnote. what really defines the tunisian cuisine is the red color. tomatoes arrived to tunis with the ottomans and landed later to Italy. in some history books the pasta tomatoes is referred first as Tunisian dish that moved to the neighboring south italy."

Let's wander through the Souk El Grana, picking up sounds, smelling and tasting colors, and knowing the sea is always nearby. Food recordings from the every day, stories from dishes through history, and the perception of food as culture. In an interview for *Dune Magazine* Rafram Chaddad recalls: When my mother is cooking pkeila and she takes five kilos of spinach and she cleans it and leaves it on a sheet to dry for two days, I see the visual aspect in that, but I also observe the connection to labor; this idea of the woman in the kitchen cooking a dish for two days straight. It's the textures, the colors, the practices that interest me, not necessarily the taste. In 2012, I won a scholarship to Halle 14 gallery in Leipzig (Germany) to exhibit a show about political and power relations in food. This really pushed me to use food within the artsing. I started to develop some pieces around that. My grandfather on my mother's side used to sell wheat and rice in Hafsia (a Jewish neighborhood in the Medina of Tunis) and he insisted on eating white couscous with white semolina because back then, wealth was equated to white food whether it be rice or couscous. The interesting thing is that today, we see the complete opposite with rich people eating organic and the whole wheat type of food. I think it is all connected to the cycle of labor, color theory, colonialism, and social phenomena."



"the urban legend tells that somewhere in 19th century, bokobza, from the boukha factory, went to syria and brought some sweet orange plants and mix them with the local red oranges, planting them behind the factory in soukra what came out was something that was called the jewish orange (long before some jews from europe turned the word jew to a national entity) and today it's called sekasli. same name like the small green lemons they have in djerba the oranges are easy to peel, look like shrimps and have a mix color inside. here they are sliced and dried in low temperature in the oven for some future cocktails and desserts" February 10, 2021



"fish as bread as fish this ramadan / nisan, everyone will fight for the best 3aloush" April 4 2022



Image/ Phillip Van den Bossche, Rafram Chaddad in Akka, January 26, 2021