



## Bringing Home the Bacon

*PAC Gallery tries a progressive marketing strategy, but is Cincinnati ready?*

**MATT MORRIS** // SEP 8, 2010

On the last Saturday in August, PAC Gallery in East Walnut Hills opened a new exhibition with an inventive strategy for including performance art in a commercial gallery exhibition.

The gallery's E-invite explained that Kris Ebeling's solo exhibition *The Pleasure of Your Companionship* would open with an exclusive performance event for no more than 30 attendees, at \$200 a head. Each guest would receive "an original work to remember the evening." (It turned out to be a drawing by the artist. Attending as a member of the press, I did not receive one.)

Performance art has been a fundamental medium for artists to explore for decades and while such work functions nicely in alternative and nonprofit spaces, the move for a young commercial space like PAC to take a risk on something less obviously salable gave me pause. Surely such genres in art can only be marketable to a small group of collectors. And how many of them reside in Cincinnati?

A ticket for this event was about double what it would cost to go to the opera or to see a Broadway show at the Aronoff Center. As a more affordable example, I thought about Marina Abramovic's recent performance art retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art where, for the price of museum admission (\$20 on an average day), visitors could see more than 50 of her historic works being reenacted by actors or shown as videos. Perhaps because performance art has always had a reputation as counter-culture and subversive, it is a tough sell to charge so much more than larger-scale theatrical productions.

I have never been great at estimating crowds, but I don't think all 30 spots were filled. As the piece began a little after 5 p.m., really only a handful of guests crisscrossed the gallery, enjoying Ebeling's series of text drawings, digital prints and washy self-portraits on display. By 6:30, when the space opened to the general public, I think, at best, guests numbered in the 20s, including gallery staff, photographers and press.

The performance featured Ebeling — who earned her BFA from the Art Academy of Cincinnati and is currently an MFA candidate at Michigan's Cranbrook Academy of Art — as both hostess and waitress, serving the gathered visitors a succession of hors d'œuvres. As she offered each course, she purred a follow-up question, "Is there anything else I can get for you?" She wore a white slip she herself had constructed, the neckline of which was a couture spectacle of wrapped and piled bacon. As the night proceeded, the slip became stained with the fat running off of the smoked meat.

The food was good, though there wasn't much of a difference between what we were being fed by the artist and what one might find at any other self-respecting gallery reception. I think most people there were waiting for something else to happen.

I for one wondered about the sexy-waitress character the artist presented. I had assumed women's lib had paved the way for young female artists to make food-based work without invoking the homemaker paradigm.

While the come-and-eat-me tone of the performance was a bit regressive, in the two-dimensional works there was more tension and delight: Odalisques appeared edible and foodstuffs were magnificently illustrated to shimmery, delectable effect.

In "When I think of you, I touch myself," the bacon collar the artist wore was languidly rendered in graphite, conte crayon and acrylic washes across a birch veneer panel that reminded me of a cutting board. Most of the artworks on display depicted or made use of bacon.

Beforehand, I thought PAC's angle in presenting the performance was pretty novel, but it didn't seem to catch on with Cincinnati's collectors, of which there were few if any during the first part of the evening. I believe it is important to exhibit and promote such work, but perhaps galleries have to absorb the costs of the performance and offset it through art sales rather than charging to experience that additional dimension of an artist's work.

---

**KRIS EBELING's two-dimensional works will remain on display at PAC Gallery through Sept.18. Go [here](#) or call 513-407-8747 for viewing times.**

<https://www.citybeat.com/arts-culture/visual-arts/article/13013601/bringing-home-the-bacon>