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Catalan Review is the premier international scholarly journal devoted to all aspects of Catalan culture. By Catalan culture is understood all manifestations of intellectual and artistic life produced in the Catalan language or in the geographical areas where Catalan is spoken. Catalan Review has been in publication since 1986.

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Catalan Review és la primera revista internacional dedicada a tots els aspectes de la cultura catalana. Per la cultura catalana s'entén totes les manifestacions de la vida intel·lectual i artística produïda en llengua catalana o en les zones geogràfiques on es parla català. Catalan Review es publica des de 1986.

Documenta 12. Kassel, Germany. June 16-September 23, 2007
Anton Pujol

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DOCUMENTA 12
KASSEL, GERMANY
JUNE 16-SEPTEMBER 23, 2007

ANTON PUJOL

In 1955, Arnold Bode envisioned Documenta as an exhibition that would signal Germany's symbolic rupture from its Nazi past. It was held in Kassel, in the middle of the beleaguered country. Since then, every five years and with a new director, Documenta becomes the center of the international art scene attracting more than half a million visitors to its monumental installations. Artists are carefully selected to present their works under a chosen topic, such as "Art in a postcolonial world" (Documenta 11) or "Art's social relevance" (Documenta 8). For any artist, an invitation from Documenta means immediate acceptance into an elite group plus an enviable international platform to showcase work. For its twelfth iteration, artistic director Roger M. Buergel designed the mammoth exhibit around three leitmotifs: "Is modernity our antiquity?", "What is bare life?" and "What is to be done?" These questions fit the purpose of Documenta perfectly. However, his choice of Ferran Adrià, among the featured 113 artists, created a whirl of controversy.

Many viewed the inclusion of the Catalan chef, recipient of countless accolades and the media darling of haute cuisine whose restaurant El Bulli has rightfully achieved legendary status, as a mere marketing ploy. It eclipsed, critics argued, the purpose of the exhibition, let alone the other artists. Buergel made a statement praising Adrià as the creator of a new language that should be considered art and, in so doing, aroused heated exchanges about the validity of cooking as art. Most notably, Robert Hughes called the chef's participation ridiculous. While the controversy lingered, Adrià talked to the press about his project and vaguely discussed several ideas but no one expected that his participation would be such a radical deconstructionist exercise; although his cuisine has often been associated with the movement, the chef has repeatedly admitted that he has never read a book by Derrida. When the doors opened in June, Pavillion G, where Adrià had been slated to show his contribution, remained empty. The chef had concluded that his art could not travel to Kassel from El Bulli. Instead, Documenta 12's (what about "the program of Docu 12 showed"? You choose) programs showed a map of Catalunya indicating the idyllic setting of the restaurant: Cala Montjoi, Girona. While the exhibition was on, El Bulli would set aside a table where two Documenta guests,

personally selected by Buergel, would enjoy Adrià's delicacies every night.

Whether Ferran Adrià's creations justifiably qualify as art or not, a larger issue looms for Catalanists regarding our artistic scene. Adrià's inclusion once again highlights how crucial the politics of food, from *escudella* to molecular cuisine, are in the cultural making of the new Catalunya. The trend that started in the early nineties revolutionized high-end food consumption has been acknowledged by leading publications such as *The New York Times* and *Le Monde* as well as by many Michelin stars. Since then, the culinary factor in the cultural equation has been reinforced by the ubiquitous conferences, seminars, and media events where food takes center stage, handsomely subsidized by the Generalitat since it is one of the selling points for the packaging of modern Catalunya. Adrià's foams, sferifications and gels, among the many wizardly techniques he boldly combines, always yield startling results; the experience not only overwhelms the senses but engages the diner in a hermeneutic exercise of the highest caliber. Not surprisingly, he is invariably compared to Antoni Gaudí and Salvador Dalí because his work reinvents an art form, on his own terms, by pushing it to never-before-seen levels. Any doubts about what El Bulli accomplishes in a given season can soon be dismissed by opening one of his enormous yearly books. His team charts the evolution of his cuisine through a meticulous and exhaustive cataloging of ingredients, combinations, and techniques. The unique mixture of science and philosophy, technology and nature is displayed in a barrage of beautifully photographed concoctions that would not feel out of place in a gallery dedicated to abstract art.

In late September, Documenta closed its doors amid underwhelming reviews. The outrage over Ferran Adrià's invitation to an art exhibition has subsided, and the bloggers had exhausted all possible arguments about the validity of cooking as art. Still, those who are familiar with the chef's contributions may sense a lost opportunity to extend what dining at El Bulli signifies and the revolution that Adrià has engineered. The prospect of sharing such a small, ephemeral sensorial experience with a large crowd would have tempted anyone; Adrià's last-minute withdrawal suggests an artist who, for this new medium, has not found the right tools. Yet.

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