

FRAME

A SEASONING SALT



INGREDIENTS

Himalayan salt
Black, white, green and pink
peppercorn
Herbes de Provence
Cardamom
Nutmeg
Cinnamon
Raw sugar
Oolong tea leaves

NOTE

The amount of ingredients used may vary.
In order to calculate the right measurement,
weight them into equal or proportional portions,
according to your own criteria.
Test and judge, until you achieve the desired
balance.

INSTRUCTIONS

Assemble the multi-coloured rocks into a
frying pan over low to medium-low heat.
Mix and shake continuously for 7-11
minutes, until a veil of smoke is formed and
the natural aromas are released.
Turn heat off, and allow the mixture rest.

In a marble mortar, add the mixture of
toasted salt, pepper, and spices, and crush
with a pestle. Add the flowery and milky
herbs, the sugar, and the wooden dust.
Crush until particles are mixed in
uniformly.

You may also use a rolling pin, a manual or
an electric grinder, a blender or a food
processor.

Mix and blend until the desired texture: is
acquired: coarse or dust.

Use with your favourite ingredients to bring
out their natural flavours and aromas: cod,
herring, haddock, sturgeon, beef, veal,
venison, pork, partridge, moose, potatoes,
sweet potatoes, aubergine, cauliflower,
cabbage, kale, spinach, salad, ice cream,
pudding, cocktails...

Use as desired, and according to your own
taste.



A group of conservators from the scientific department of a renowned museum in central Italy discovered a treasure hidden in the back of an image of Mary and Christ from around 1400s. Over a surface of about 60 x 45 cm, they saw a panel covered in a set of precious stones: gold, lapis lazuli, marble, porphyry, ruby, amethyst, topaz, onyx, and amber. The reverse of the panel revealed a world that did not belong to the supra-natural, but to one below the eye level.

Miners glean the earth in order to extract the precious materials that have enabled the making of some of the most beautiful objects in the history of humanity. They work with the strength of their two hands; with pickaxe, shovel, and hammer; they let the weight of their bodies fall and press against the soil; they inhale the vapours exuded from the earth, as if through their tools, motion, and bodily constitution, the human and the mineral became one.

The early modern miner shared a number of properties with the four elements: celestial bodies, water, fire, and the fruit of the land.

In *The Gleaners and I*, the French director Agnes Varda collects a series of descriptions, stories and experiences related to the act of gleaning, as told from different angles: a medieval church, the Enlightenment, a nineteenth century painter, the French countryside, an encyclopedic definition, pictorial representation, potato harvesting, scavenging, and film-making. When Varda gleanes to pick up a heart-shaped potato, suddenly, the hand that sees becomes visible, and Varda becomes a gleaner herself. The “I” is the other part of the story.

We see her hand and the wrinkles that manifest time, her grey hair, a leak in the roof, and a mirror. With the aid of a hand-held camera as her instrument of making, she makes herself visible in a film that is as much about Millet and the potato eaters, as it is about herself and her camera. The sneak peak of her hand and the mirror are like the revelation to the Italian conservators when they reversed the panel and saw what the frame was made of: a set of crystal rocks that made the front of the image as precious as their pristine sheen.

Like one art theorist said once before the times of Leonardo: to make art is to make the invisible become visible. The back of the painting, the picking ax, the jewellery-artist, the paint and the brush, the hand-held camera. Seeing is choosing.

In another scene of *The Gleaners and I*, Varda shows a medieval scene of the Last Judgment. Who stands on the right, and who on the left, and according to whose perspective? What is hiding behind the picture?

OPERATIONALIZATION

In this recipe, I relied on three different elements to create the taste of “framing:” materiality, judgment, and making, as operationalized through panel painting, mining, and film-making, accordingly. Relying on Anne Dunlop’s study on the stone back of Gentile da Fabriano’s *Madonna and Child* (c. 1421, Museo Nazionale di San Matteo, Pisa), the body of the early modern miner, and Agnes Varda’s documentary film *The Gleaners and I*, I regard these elements as the conditions of possibility for the construction of a representation.

First of all, I borrowed the idea of the stone back of the panel due to the following two reasons: 1) first, because it restores the value of medium, materiality and the frame for the making of meaning; and 2) second, because it shows how operational choices allow ideas to become manifest, which, in this case, is the preciousness and otherworldliness of the Virgin. Following these two notions, I decided to use Himalayan salt, for it is also extracted from the earth, it has a crystalline shine, and it is believed to add a special flavour to dishes. Also, I mixed in a series of colourful peppercorns, playing with the idea of the multicoloured stones of Da Fabriano’s panel. Finally, the inclusion of marble in the back panel in question defined my choice of instrument for the making of the recipe. The mortar and pestle in front of the back of the canvas is also an illusion to the craftsmanship of pigment-making, which is an essential part of conceptual framing in historical visual art.

At the same time, the marble mortar and pestle function as a reference to the manual labour of the gleaner, the miner, and the cameraman. This labor is completed with both one’s bodily scheme, and the aid of a tool, chosen according to the needs of the maker. This work enables the artisan to transform the “raw” materials of nature, shaping them into whatever form they decide: a pendant, a painting, a film, a plate of mashed potatoes. The *herbs de Provence* is a brief reference to Varda’s wandering through the French countryside.

The ambiguity in both the ingredient list and the instructions for completing the recipe was introduced purposefully, as a means of playing with the cook’s judgment and taste. That is why even the marble and pestle, are subject to the cook’s sense. They can opt for a manual or an artificially-produced taste, for a coarse or a refined finish; whatever their choice is, it bears direct consequences on the meaning of the dish. As in Varda’s scene on the Last Judgment, every artist has to ponder, abstract, and select the elements that gives shape to their work.

Finally, I decided to make a seasoning salt because it is salt what brings out the flavour of a dish, and the basic element that gives balance to its chemical composition. The seasoning is often imperceptible: we can taste it only after the first bite of the final product; however, if it was not there, we could certainly sense its absence. Salt is the condition of possibility of the taste of a dish—like the invisible working hands behind our everyday objects, the camera that made our favourite film, or the frame of a painting.



is for **S**acred

i. **F**ish and salt // Almost 1,300 years ago, the geographer Al-Faziri described Ghana as “the land of gold.” The golden metal was extracted from the heart of the prosperous Ghanaian soil, crossed the Sahara desert, transported by caravans of camels, and was further exchanged for salt. Gold was regarded as precious because of its purity, and because it was believed that its colour and brilliance resembled the shining splendour of god. Ghanaian gold was cherished dear not only because of the mythical abundance of the land, but also because of its distant geography. Salt, on the other hand, comes directly from the earth. It is the only edible rock we can find in nature, either on earth or the sea. Its crystalline appearance reflects directly the rays of light from the sun. It preserves the flesh of all living things from decay. It brings out the flavour even from the humblest of the ingredients. And it has the ability to seal oaths and restore amicability. Pliny once wrote that gold, all stones and metals, and pigments, came from the body of the living, whether real or imaginary. For instance, lapis lazuli was guarded by the blood of dragons, while other materials grew within the entrails of fish or the nets of snakes. However, once gold was placed onto painting, these images acquired a different meaning. Nowadays, they are regarded as “primitive,” given its excess of both colour and brilliance—they could not be farther from the “real” natural world. Gold was also minted into coins, transmuting into currency, material of commercial exchange, and people’s vice. What came from a holy land became ordinary and mundane. Today, the geography of Ghana has shifted: where it used to be in the times of Al-Faziri, is now

located somewhere between modern Mali and Mauritania. ¶ ii. **C**avolo nero. // The mandrake looks like the human body; yet it is entirely other. With half of his head sticking out of the dirt, and the other half of his body buried underground, it belongs to both air and the earth, the here and the far, heaven and the underworld, life and death. It can restore health and prolong life as much as it can grant access to an alternate reality, and be poison to

death. It is up and down, head and guts, good and bad. ¶ iii. **B**lueberries. // The word “lapis lazuli” means “from over the sea;” it is its imaginary far-off origin what defines its essence and attributes. It was mined with a pickaxe, through the power of fire and cold. Then, it traversed the seas, was acquired at a costly expense, made into a pigment through kneading and grinding, mixed with oil and a binder of a natural origin—like egg—to protect and glaze, and painted onto the robe of the Virgin. The transubstantiation from overseas mineral into celestial cloth materialized the sacred nature of the Virgin, in an effective case of metonymy: it came from somewhere as far as heaven, and its colour, resembling that of the skies where she dwells, stood in its place. However, with the advent of industrialization, azurite, a less expensive material, progressively took its place, starting from a subtle contamination until, centuries later, it would be entirely replaced by the oil tube at DeSerres. The link between the special colour blue and heaven was lost. Could it ever be restored? There are very few things in the natural world with the ability to mimic the colour of the Virgin’s robe. Red pigments are often made of cochineal, and in Velázquez’ *Las Meninas*, it was a clear sign of its origin in the New Spain, a place of richness and power. Ruby red and emerald green are named after the precious minerals, yet they are made of artificial polymers. Van Gogh’s vibrant yellow is often described in gallery blockbusters as “lemon yellow.” The only time I have seen a lemon as yellow as van Gogh’s, was once in a tv show about the travel diaries of a cook, who once visited the house of an old woman in a small village somewhere in a Greek island. He squeezed the bright fruit over a handful of fresh and wild leaves, as the juice slipped through his fingers and ran down his firm strong hands. My mouth watered.

Operationalization

For this recipe, I relied on the use of three basic ingredients in order to represent the taste of the sacred: salted fish, *cavolo nero*, and blueberries.

Koobi stars the dish, given its association between geographical origin and meaning[, and the properties of salt.] I followed Jacobi's and Dunlop's argument on the value of gold within a material approach to history. The meaning of gold was given by an imaginary link between the mineral and a far-off origin, which made it appear as exotic, and therefore, costly. However, this view has a multiple role-reversal: 1) first, gold degraded into the mundane as soon as it started being used as currency; 2) then, it was dismissed by a later viewer as "primitive"—which aligns with Taussig's division of society according to their use of colour; 4) geographies shift over time, acquiring new meanings, and relativizing origins; and 3) the aforementioned exotic nature only reveals gold's colonial power. There is always another side of the story, as described by Taussig in his essay *The Language of Flowers*. Here it is where the second ingredient acquires meaning.

The inclusion of *cavolo nero* represents an analogy to the two-fold nature of the mandrake. It is also plucked out from the earth, and mutilated. However, in contrast with regular cabbage or kale, black cabbage is sweeter, crispier, and its very name defines its colour duality.

Finally, the blueberry constitutes an attempt to imitate the colour of blue as it appears in nature. Its preparation as a glaze with sugar and vinegar serves four functions: 1) first, to add a hint of sweetness to the overall flavour of the dish—which I imagine to be the taste of the sacred; 2) to provide balance, like the early modern view on man, nature and the divine in perfect harmony; 3) to play with the tanginess of the fruit and vinegar's association to Christ's last taste in the cross, which resonates with the thirst caused by the salt of the fish; and 4) to imitate the glaze of the coat in oil painting. According to Barthes in "The World as Object," the glaze, both illusionistic and material, defines painting as the fetishization of the world. That is, that what once was regarded as sacred, has now become the object of industry. In Lehmann's analysis of oil painting, it is the transparency of oil what turned it into a mechanism of "enchantment." For Taussig, however, we live in a world of disenchantment, where modernity is defined by a lack of colour. Finally, this transparency is also what allows light to refract upon the object it covers. According to Mircea Eliade, this is the real hierophany: the manifestation of the sacred through a ray of light that makes the quotidian visible.

The scales of the fish, a species of humble origin and distinctive smell, are luminous and iridescent.

A hint of lemon is added to balance the fishy taste of the Koobi, allude to the body of the Christ, Van Gogh's yellow paint, and my story on an imaginary Greek citric. The use of extra virgin olive oil plays with its purity and that of the virgin dressed in lapis lazuli, the salt-moist and cold-heat balance, the described qualities of oil in painting, and the association with a virtual *topos*: Greece, Ghana, and the TV screen.

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SACRED

PREP TIME

7 days

COOK TIME

1 hour

SERVINGS

3

INGREDIENTS

3 Koobi (Ghanaian salted tilapia)
A handful of cavolo nero
1 cup of wild blueberries
6-7 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil
2 tablespoons of fresh rosemary
½ cup of balsamic vinegar
200g of white wine
3 small shallots
1 tablespoon of ginger
1 lemon, cut in half

4 garlic cloves, sliced
Brown sugar
Saffron, cardamom, nutmeg
Salt and freshly ground pepper

For the Koobi
3 large fresh tilapia
Kosher salt

INSTRUCTIONS

Day 1

Koobi

Wash and gut the fish.

Stuff the tilapia, pouring the rock salt inside its head and entrails, and over its skin.

Let the salt impregnate the body of the fish, remove the moist from its flesh, and preserve it.

Day 7

Bathe Koobi in water to remove the salt and soften its flesh.

Put on the fire and heat up a pan over low heat. Add 3 tablespoons of the extra virgin olive oil, and once it is hot, place the fish onto the pan and fry it, until the oil has restored its original dampness. Add the white wine.

Wash the cavolo nero, making sure not a single speck of dirt remains.

Remove the heart of the cavolo nero, trim its stems, and chop it into thick slices.

Put on the fire, and heat up the olive oil over a low heat.

Chop the ginger and the garlic, add, and cook until aromas are released. Add the cavolo nero and season with salt, pepper, and spices to taste.

On a separate pan, add the remaining oil from the fried Koobi, and the shallots chopped into finely diced cubes. Cook it for 2-3 minutes, until transparent and caramelized. Add the balsamic vinegar, the brown sugar, and ¾ of the blueberries. Bring to a boil and lower heat to simmer. Let the berries cook for 3-4 minutes, and with the back of a wooden spoon, crush some of them against the bottom of the pan.

Serve the fish on top of a bed of fried cavolo nero. Glaze with the blueberry sauce, and decorate with the rest of the blueberries and a hint of lemon to achieve balance.



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