

## Photographers Create the Tiniest of Dramas on Your Dinner

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If you're playing with your mashed potatoes at dinner, it's a safe bet you're socially uncomfortable or preoccupied by something. Unless, of course, you're with Pierre Javelle and Akiko Ida, in which case you're probably helping them craft their next work of art. Their MINIMIAM series uses fruit, vegetables, and sweets as the edible backdrops for surprisingly engaging dramas played out by figurines like those used in model train sets.

"This scale is really interesting as it allows you to work in the very small," says Javelle. "The size of the figurines is perfect for creating surprising scenes with very ordinary elements."

The food often provides inspiration for the wide variety of cleverly crafted scenes the married couple composes. The surface of a sprinkled donut becomes a rolling golf course, the innards of a gourd an alien landscape with a healthy dash of Ridley Scott. Other times, the figures fuel the idea.

"For example, one of first images is a figurine of a man with a mower mowing, which gave us the urge to cut a kiwi," says Javelle, "especially since a new breed of hairless kiwi appeared at our super market!"

The series, which began in 2002, includes more than 60 diptychs. The first of each pair shows a close crop on a strange or funny scene playing out on unfamiliar terrain. The second image zooms out to reveal its culinary context, often inspiring a chuckle through a watering mouth. The figurines are 1/87 scale — the popular HO model train scale — purchased from hobby shops. "They are about 1.2 cm (0.47 inches) tall, and it would be very difficult for us to manufacture the figures with the detail you see in our images," says Javelle.

The project grew from the couple's shared childhood interests in food and tiny things. Javelle cites Ida's early habit of creating wee comic strips and photographing pieces of food. Javelle grew up enamored by the miniscule pebble garden his grandmother had. "I was fascinated by the composition of the colorful pebbles and tiny bridge," he says. "This was a mind-blowing landscape that really impressed me."

The small scenes also imply larger concerns of today — GMOs, global warming, war, mankind's relationship with nature. "This desire to dominate, convert, enslave nature is a bit like what we do when cooking," says Javelle, who also insists that the images are not meant to be taken too seriously. "The purpose of these images is, above all, to please people. We believe that art is not there only to reveal the injustices or the horror of the world. Sometimes of course it is a subtler means of conveying messages, but the boundary between activism and artistic expression can easily become blurred."

In addition to using food photography as means of expression and entertainment, the pair behind MINIMIAM also have successful careers as commercial photographers of cuisine. Even as veterans of the trade, and with their art sitting on the plate, the urge to take a bite can be pretty hard to resist. "Often when I place a figure next to a big piece of cake chocolate, I have a furious desire to become the figure," says Javelle. "But I would definitely have a very upset stomach afterwards."

*Photos: Pierre Javelle and Akiko Ida*

